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THE MOTORMANIACS

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By
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THE MOTORMANIACS

INCLUDING

THE MOTORMANIACS

The Episode of the Girl and the Englishman

THE GREAT BUBBLE SYNDICATE

The Episode of the Close Corporation

COAL OIL JOHNNY

The Episode of the Charitable Maiden

JONES

The Episode of the Hesitating Suitor

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THE MOTORMANIACS

"It's jolly to get you off by yourself," I said as we wandered away from the rest of the party.

"Then you are not afraid of an engaged girl," she observed. "Everybody else seems to be."

"I am made of sterner stuff," I said. "Besides, I am dying to know all about it."

"All about what?"

"What you found to like in Gerard Malcolm, and what Gerard Malcolm found to like in you, and what he said and what you said and what the Englishman said, and how it all happened generally."

"What you want to know would fill a book."

"You speak as if you mean it to be a sealed one."

"I don't see exactly what claim you have to be a reader."

"Well, I was the first person to love you," I said. "Surely that ought to count for something. It didn't last long, I know, but it was a wild business while it did. When I discovered you were just out for scalps — "

"And when I discovered you were the most conceited, monopolizing, jealous, troublesome and exacting man that ever lived, and that I was expected to play kitten while you did demon child — "

"Oh, of course, it was a mistake," I said quickly. "The illusion couldn't be kept up on either side. We only really got chummy after we called it off."

"The trouble was that we were both scalpers, and when we decided to let each other alone — in that way, I mean — we built up a pleasant professional acquaintance on the ashes of the dead fires."

"Can't you make it a little warmer than acquaintance?" I protested.

"It was a real fellow feeling — whatever

you choose to call it," she conceded. "You wanted to talk about yourself, and I wanted to talk about myself, and without any self-flattery I think I can say we found each other very responsive."

"I've rather a memory that you got the best of the bargain."

"There were hours and hours when I couldn't get a word in edgewise."

"And there were whole days and days —" I began.

"Now, don't let's work up a fuss," she said sweetly. "We won't have so many more talks together, and anyway it isn't professional etiquette for us to fight."

"Who wants to fight?" I said. "I never was that kind of Indian."

"Then let's begin where we left off."

"It used to be all Harry Clayton then," I remarked.

"Was it as long ago as that?" she asked. "Oh, dear, how time passes!"

"He joined the great majority, I heard."

"Oh, yes, he's married," she said. "He

wasn't any good at all. What can you do with a person who has scalps to burn?"

"That kind of thing discourages an Indian," I remarked.

"It robs the thing of all its zip, but I suppose there's a Harry Clayton kind of girl, too."

"The woods are full of them."

"I am almost glad I've decided to bury the tomahawk."

"And leave me the last of the noble race?"

"You'll have to whoop alone."

"I'll often think of you in your log cabin with the white man," I said. "On winter nights I'll flatten my nose against the window-pane and have a little peek in; next day you'll recognize my footsteps in the snow."

"I'd be sure to know them by their size."

"I'm going to take ten dollars off your wedding present for that."

"It was one of our rules we could say anything we liked."

"It was a life of savage freedom. It takes one a little time to get into it again."

"You used to say things, too."

"I can't remember saying anything as horrid as that."

"Well, you couldn't, you know," she said, and put out the tip of a little slipper.

"I thought all the while it was to be Captain Cartwright — that Englishman with the eye-glass."

"I thought so, too."

"I read of the engagement in the papers, and I can not recollect that it was ever contradicted or anything."

"Oh, it wasn't," she said. "At least, not till later — lots later."

"I suppose I ought to hurriedly talk about something else," I remarked.

"You needn't feel like that at all," she returned. "The captain and I are very good friends — only he doesn't play in my yard any more."

"I can't remember Gerard Malcolm very well," I went on. "Wasn't he rather tall and thin, with a big nose and a hidden-away sister who was supposed to be an invalid?"

"That's one way of describing him."

"I'd rather like to hear yours."

"Oh, I'm quite silly about him."

"That must have happened later," I said. "It certainly didn't show at the time."

"Everything must have a beginning, you know."

"That's what I want to get at,— what made you get a transfer from the captain?"

"It all happened through an automobile," she said.

"Oh, an automobile!" I exclaimed.

"It was an awfully up-to-date affair altogether!"

"I suppose it ran away and he caught it by the bridle at the risk of his life?"

"No, he didn't stop it," she said. "He made it *go*."

"It isn't everybody can do that with an automobile."

"You ought to have seen the poor captain turn the crank!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh of recollection.

"So the captain was there, too?" I said.

"He never struck me as the kind of man that could make anything go, exactly."

"Oh, he didn't," she said.

"I am surprised that he even tried."

"But Gerard is a perfectly beautiful mechanic. You ought to see how respectful they are to him at the garage — especially when there's a French car in trouble."

"They are respectful to me, too."

"That's only because you're rich," she returned.

"I own a French car and drive it myself," I said, "and — but I see there's no use of my saying anything."

"It's genius with Gerard," she said. "It makes one solemn to think how much he knows about gas engines."

"So that's how he did it!" I observed. "Different men have different ways to charm, I suppose. I don't remember that looks were his long suit."

"If you were a woman, that would be called catty."

"Oh, I don't want to detract from him,"

I said. "He used to dance with wall-flowers and they said he was an angel to his sister."

"It was that sister who was the real trouble," she said meditatively.

"What had she to do with it?" I asked.

"Oh, just being there — being his sister — being an invalid, you know."

"No, I don't know, at all."

"The trouble is, I'm telling you the end of the story first."

"Let's start at the very beginning."

"In real life beginnings and middles and ends of things are all so jumbled up."

"When I went away," I said, "everybody thought it was Harry Clayton, with the Englishman as a strong second, and there wasn't any Malcolm about it."

"Do you remember the flurry in Great Westerns?" she asked.

"That's surely the beginning of something else," I remarked.

"No, it's the beginning of this."

"I've a faint memory they jumped up to something tremendous, didn't they?"

"It was the biggest thing of its kind ever seen on Wall Street."

"Wall Street!" I exclaimed. "The voice is Jess Hardy's, but —"

"Well, you can't buy a Manton car without a little trouble."

"Or twenty-five hundred dollars in a certified check."

"It's nearer three thousand, with acetylene lamps, top, baskets, extra tires, French tooter, freight, insurance, extra tools and a leather coat."

"You've got the thing down fine," I said. "You speak like a folder."

"Well, I didn't have any three thousand dollars," she continued, undisturbed; "all I had was an allowance of a hundred a month, a grand piano, a horse (you remember my blood mare, Gee-whizz?) a lot of posters, and a father."

"He seems to me the biggest asset of the lot," I observed.

"I thought so, too, till I tried him," she said. "He had the automobile fever, too —

only the negative kind — wanted to shoot them with a gun."

"Surely it's dangerous enough already, without adding that."

"For a time I didn't know what to do," she went on. "I thought I'd have to try the stage, or write one of those Marie Bashkirtseff books that shock people into buying them by thousands — and whenever I saw a Manton on the road my eyes would almost pop out of my head. Then, when I was almost desperate, Mr. Collenquest came on a visit to papa."

"I see now why you said Wall Street," I remarked.

"Mr. Collenquest is an old friend of papa's," she continued. "They were at the same college, and both belonged to what they call 'the wonderful old class of seventy-nine,' and there's nothing in the world papa wouldn't do for Mr. Collenquest or Mr. Collenquest for papa. I had never seen him before and had rather a wild idea of him from the caricatures in the paper — you know the

kind — with dollar-signs all over his clothes and one of his feet on the neck of Honest Toil. Well, he wasn't like that a bit — in fact, he was more like a bishop than anything else — and the only thing he ever put his foot on was a chair when he and papa would sit up half the night talking about the wonderful old class of seventy-nine. Papa is rather a quiet man ordinarily, but that week it seemed as though he'd never stop laughing; and I'd wake up at one o'clock in the morning and hear them still at it. Of course, they had long serious talks, too, and Mr. Collenquest was never so like a bishop as when the conversation turned on stocks and Wall Street. When he boomed out things like 'the increasing tendency of associated capital in this country,' or 'the admitted financial emancipation of the Middle West,' — you felt somehow you were a better girl for having listened to him. What he seemed to like best — besides sitting up all night till papa was a wreck — was to take walks. He was as bad about horses as papa was about automo-

biles — and of course papa had to go, too — and naturally I tagged after them both — and so we walked and walked and walked.

"Well, one day they were talking about investments, and stocks, and how cheap money was, and how hard it was to know what to do with it, and I was picking wild-flowers and wondering whether I'd have my Manton red, or green with gilt stripes, when I heard something that brought me up like an explosion in the muffler.

"'I know you are pretty well fixed, Fred,' said Mr. Collenquest, 'but I never knew a man yet who couldn't do with forty or fifty thousand more.'

"'I don't care to get it that way, Bill,' said my father.

"'I tell you Great Western is going to reach six hundred and fifty,' said Mr. Collenquest.

"I picked daisies fast, but if there ever was a girl all ears, it was I.

"'I am giving you a bit of inside information that's worth millions of dollars,' said Mr.

Collenquest in that solemn tone that always gave me the better-girl feeling.

"'My dear old chap,' said papa, 'I don't want you to believe I am not grateful for this sort of proof of your friendship; and you mustn't think, because I have strong convictions, that I arrogate any superior virtue to myself. Every man must be a law to himself. I have never speculated and I never will.'

"Mr. Collenquest heaved a regular bishop's sigh, and stopped and put one foot on a log as though it was a toiler.

"'This isn't speculation, Fred,' he said. 'This is a fact, because I happen to be rigging the market myself.'

"'I don't care to do it,' said my father, as firmly as before.

"'If it's just being a little short of ready money,' said Mr. Collenquest, 'well — my purse is yours, you know — from one figure to six.'

"My father only shook his head.

"'I said fifty thousand,' said Mr. Collen-

quest, ' but there is nothing to prevent your adding another naught to it.'

" ' It's speculating,' said my father.

" ' Well, I'm sorry,' said Mr Collenquest. ' I'm getting pretty far into the forties now, Fred, and I don't think the world holds anything dearer to me than a few old friends like yourself.' He put out his hand as he spoke, and papa took it. It was awfully affecting. I looked as girly-girly as I could, lest they should catch me listening, and picked daisies harder than ever.

" ' Of course, this is sacredly confidential,' said Mr. Collenquest, ' but I know you'll let it go no farther, Fred.'

" ' My word on that,' said my father in his grand, gentleman-of-the-old-school way.

" Then they started to walk again, and though I felt a little sneak right down to my shoes, I listened and listened for anything more. But they wandered off into the Pressed Steel Car Company, till it got so tiresome I ached all over.

" That night I didn't do anything, be-

cause I wanted to think it over; but the next morning I went to papa and asked him point-blank if I might sell Gee-whizz if I wanted to. He looked very grave, and talked a lot about what a good horse Gee-whizz was, and how hard I'd find it to replace her. But it was one of papa's rules that there shouldn't be any strings to his presents to me — that's the comfort of having a thoroughbred for your father, you know — and ever since I was a little child he had always told me what was mine was mine to do just what I liked with. He's the whitest father a girl ever had. But he spoke to me beautifully in a sort of man-to-man way, and was perfectly splendid in not asking any questions. If he hadn't been such a bubble-hater, I'd have thrown my arms round his neck and told him everything. So I let it go at promising him the refusal of the mare in case I decided to sell her.

"Then I kited after Mr. Collenquest, whom I found in a hammock, reading a basketful of telegrams.

"'Oh, don't get up,' I said (because he

was always a most punctilious old fellow). 'The fact is, I just wanted to have a little business talk with you.'

"'Oh, a business talk,' he said, in a be-nice-to-the-child tone.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I thought I might perhaps take a little flyer in Great Westerns.'

"You ought to have seen him leap out of that hammock. I quaked all over, like Honest Labor in the pictures.

"He smothered an awful bad swear and turned as pale as a white Panhard.

"'Little girl,' he said, 'you've been listening to things you had no right to hear.'

"'I didn't mean to listen,' I said. 'Really and truly, Mr. Collenquest, I didn't —'

"'You were forty feet away picking wildflowers,' he said.

"'You didn't realize how badly I wanted a Manton,' I said.

"'A Manton!' he cried out. 'What in heaven's name is a Manton?'

"It's awful to think how little some peo-

ple know! I'm sure he thought it was something to wear.

"I explained to him what a Manton is.

"'And so you must have a Manton,' he said.

"'Did you ever want anything so bad that it kept you awake at night?' I asked him.

"He looked at me a long time without saying a word. He was one of the kings of Wall Street and I was only a five-foot-three girl, and I felt such a little cad when I saw his hands were trembling.

"'Jess,' he said, 'if you chose to do it you could half ruin me. You could shake some of the biggest houses in New York; you could drive the Forty-fourth National Bank into the hands of a receiver. You could start a financial earthquake.'

"And he looked at me again a long time.

"'The point is,' he began once more, 'are you strong enough to keep such a secret? Have you the character to do it — the grit — the determination?'

"'Just watch me!' I said.

"I thought it was a good sign that he smiled.

"'Just keep this to yourself for one month,' he said, 'and I'll send you the biggest, the reddest, the most dangerous, noisy, horse-frightening, man-destroying, high-stepping, high-smelling — what do you call it — Manton? — in the whole United States.'

"'Oh, Mr. Collenquest, I couldn't do that,' I said.

"Then he got frightened all over again.

"'Why not?' he demanded. 'Why not?'

"'I wouldn't put a price on my secrecy,' I said. 'That wasn't what I meant at all, only I thought you might be good-natured enough to let me in on the deal — with a margin on Gee-whizz, you know.'

"'I suppose I am getting old,' he said, 'and getting stupid — but would you mind explaining to me what you want in words of one syllable?'

"'You wanted to put papa on a good thing,' I said. 'He wouldn't have it, so I thought you might pass it along to me.'

"'You seem to have passed it along to yourself,' he remarked, a bit ironically.

"'It's a very small matter to you,' I pleaded, 'but it's a whole Manton to me.'

"'And the shock nearly killed father,' he said, mopping his bishop forehead.

"'I can make papa give me four hundred and fifty dollars for Gee-whizz,' I said; 'and the question is, is that enough?'

"'Enough for what?' he asked.

"'For a Manton, of course,' I said.

"'Would you mind putting it in figures instead of gasoline?' he said, laughing as though he had made an awfully good joke. I laughed, too — just to humor him.

"'Well,' I said, 'with acetylene lamps, top, baskets, extra tires, French tooter, freight, insurance, spare tools and a leather coat — say three thousand.'

"'I can double that for you,' he said.

"'I don't want one cent more,' I said. That was just my chance to shine — and I shined.

"He made a note of it in his pocketbook.

"'That's settled,' he said.

"'Not till I've said one thing more,' I remarked, 'and that is, I shan't be horrid if the thing goes the wrong way. My dressmaker once put a hundred dollars in an oil company, and the oil company man was surer than you — and yet it went pop. I can easily tease my mare back from papa.'

"He lay back again in the hammock and laughed, and laughed, and laughed.

"'Oh, Jess Hardy,' he said, 'you'll be the death of me!' — and he laughed as though it was at one of his own jokes.

"'I'd hate to make a vacancy in the wonderful old class of seventy-nine,' I said.

"'Now, I want to say something, too,' he said, getting serious again. 'If you have a pet minister who can't afford a holiday, or you want to help that dressmaker pay off her mortgage, or give a boost to a poor family who have had diphtheria — don't you think to help them by tipping off Great Western Preferred. That sort of charity may sound cheap, but it's likely to cost me hundreds of

thousands. Let me know, and I'll send them checks.'

"'Don't you worry about me,' I said.

"'I am told you are engaged to an Englishman,' he said; 'an Embassy man at Washington. You aren't making any kind of mental reservation in his case, are you?'

"'He's the last person I tell anything to,' I said. 'That is, — anything important, you know.'

"'Then, Miss Jess Hardy,' he said, with his eyes twinkling as though he were giving an Apostolic benediction at a Vanderbilt wedding, 'if you'll bring me your four-fifty we'll close the deal.'

"'Perhaps it would be as well to leave papa out of this,' I hinted. 'I mean about telling him anything, you know.'

"'Oh, distinctly,' he said. 'Fred's a bit old-fashioned and we must respect his prejudices. Wait till you get him on the cow-catcher of your Manton, and then break it to him gently.'

"'And, Mr. Collenquest,' I said, 'if you

should really think it awfully low and horrid of me to do this — I won't do it.'

"'My dear little girl,' he returned, 'get that out of your head right here. I hope your car will prove everything you want it to be, and the same with your Englishman, and I'm only too grateful that it wasn't a steam yacht you had set your heart on, or a palace on the Hudson.'

"There isn't much more to be said about this part of the affair. Papa paid me four-fifty for Gee-whizz, and I handed the check to Mr. Collenquest, and Mr. Collenquest went away, and then the market began to turn bullish (isn't that the word?) and Great Western went up with a whoop, and it got whoopier and whoopier; and whenever anybody was certain it had reached the top-notch it would take another kick skyward, and it went on jumping and jumping till finally there came a letter from Mr. Collenquest with a check for three thousand five hundred dollars, saying I must have forgotten about buying Gee-whizz back again, and that he had

taken the liberty of exceeding my instructions about selling till my shares had touched that figure. Then one morning, as we were at breakfast, a great big splendid Manton car — my car — came whisking up the drive and stopped in front of the house, and the expert — they had thrown him in for a week for nothing — him and an odometer and an ammeter and a new kind of French spark-plug they wanted me to try — and a gasoline tester — the Mantons are such nice people to deal with in all those little ways — and the expert sent in word: would Miss Hardy come out and see her new car? And, of course, Miss Hardy went out, and Mr. Hardy went out, and my aunt went out, and the five guests that were staying with us went out, and the servants went out — and you never saw such a mix-up in all your life, nor such excitement and hurrah-boys generally. For papa was ordering it off the place, and I was explaining about Great Western Preferred, and my aunt was trying to make us listen about a friend who had been burned to death with a gasoline

stove, and the guests were taking my part and fighting for the first ride, and the expert was showing off the double vertical cylinders, and explaining splash lubrication to the butler, whom he must have mistaken for papa, and —

"When it had settled down a bit and the battle-smoke drifted away and showed who had won — which was me, naturally — and I had promised aunt to be, oh, so careful, and papa that I'd cross my heart never to go into stocks again, and rides, of course, to the guests, and everything to everybody — then they all went back to breakfast while I had mine brought out on the veranda — mine and the expert's — and I guess I talked four speeds ahead while he ate his on the low gear — for he had come ninety miles and wasn't much of a talker at any time — and I just sat there and gloated over my Manton.

"We had a perfectly delirious week together — the expert and I — for the Manton turned out perfectly splendid and everything they said it was, except for the rear tires blowing up three times, and a short circuit in

the coil owing to a faulty condenser; and though it was all I could do to hold it down on the low speeds, you ought to have seen me on the forty-mile clip — till they said I'd have to go to prison for the next offense without the option of a fine. The expert was one of the nicest men you ever saw, and we used to take off cylinder heads, and adjust cams, and spend hours knocking everything to pieces and putting them together again so that I might be prepared for getting on without him. He said he hated to think of that time, and what do you suppose he did? I was lying under the machine at the time, studying the differential, while he was jacking up an axle. Proposed, positively. I dropped a nut and a cotter pin out of my mouth, I was so astonished. We talked it over for about five minutes through one of the artillery wheels, and I must say he took it beautifully. I wanted to be nice to him, because he had been so patient in explaining things, and never got tired of being asked the same question fifty times. He wiped his eyes with some

cotton waste and told me that even if years were to pass and oceans and continents divide us, I had only to say 'come' and he'd come — that is, if I ever got into real trouble with the Manton.

"When it came to saying good-by to him I let him take my cap as a keepsake and accepted a dynamo igniter that he guaranteed not to burn out the wires (though that's exactly what it did a week afterward) and it was all too sad for anything. The governor, you know, that was attached to the igniter, got stuck somehow, and of course the current just sizzled up the plug. Then, when I had been running the machine for about a week and doing splendidly with it, Captain Cartwright turned up from Washington. I suppose I wasn't so pleased as I ought to have been to see him, for though we were engaged and all that, there were wheels within wheels and — you know how silly girls are and what fool things they do, and Gerard Malcolm — and the captain, to make matters worse, talked a whole streak about good form, and how in

England they always walked their automobiles, and how hateful anything like speeding (and going to jail) was to a real English lady, and 'Oh, my dear, would the Queen do it?' Can't you hear him? It goaded me into saying awful things back, and when I took him out for his first spin, as grumpy as only an Englishman can be after you've insulted him from his hat to his boots, I just opened the throttle, threw in the high clutch, and let her go. There were some things I liked about the captain, and the best was that he didn't scare easy. He just folded his arms and never wiggled an eyelash while I took some of the grades like the Empire State Express.

"I knew he was boiling inside, in spite of his calm, British, new-washed look, for I hadn't let him kiss me or anything, and nobody, however brave he is, welcomes the idea of being squashed under a ton of old iron. You see I was in a perfectly vicious humor, thinking what an awful mistake I had made, and what a little fool I had been, and how if

it had only been Gerard Malcolm — and while my hands were clenched on the steering-wheel I could see the mark of his horrid ring sticking through my gauntlets, and I wouldn't have cared two straws if I had blown up a tire just then, and driven head-foremost through a stone wall.

"I had given him about eighteen miles of this sort of thing when the right-hand cylinder began to miss a little. Then, after a while, the left started to skip, too. I stopped under a tree to look for the trouble and pulled up the bonnet. The spark-plugs were badly carbonized, and when I had seen to them and had put the captain on the crank, we could only get explosions at intervals. There was good compression; everything was lubricating nicely; no heating or sticking anywhere — but the engine had lain down on us. The captain was so angry he wouldn't speak a word to me, and mumbled red-hot things to himself under his breath. Guess how *I* felt. But he was too much of a gentleman not to crank — and so he cranked and cranked and

still nothing happened. I chased a whole row of things one after another — battery, buzzer, oil or gasoline in the cylinders, defective insulation, commutator, water in the carburettor, choked feed-pipe,— and all it did was to cough in a dreary, tow-me-home-to-mother sort of way.

"If the captain had known anything about engines and could have made it start, I expect I would have married him and lived happy ever afterward. It was just his Heaven-sent chance to win out and show he was the right man for the place. But he didn't know enough to run a phonograph and began to talk about getting towed home, and how if *he* ever bought a machine it would be electric. If I had been out of patience with him before, imagine what I felt then! He said he knew all the time I was driving too fast and hurting something, and thought he had proved it by the cylinders being hot — as though they aren't always hot. It was awful how stupid he was and helpless and disagreeable. He couldn't even crank properly and the engine

back-fired on him and hurt his hand. Finally I got so desperate that I sat down and cried, while he nursed his hand and said we ought to desert the machine and go home, and that papa would be anxious if we didn't turn up to lunch. I knew all the time he was talking about *his* lunch. You don't know what an Englishman is if he isn't fed regularly, and it was now after one and we were eighteen miles from High Court.

"But I wasn't the girl to give up the ship. As long as there weren't any fractures or things stuck together I knew the expert could have made it go — and if the expert, why not I? If the captain hadn't flurried me with all the silly things he said, I believe I would have ferreted out the trouble all right. But I was so cross and tired and disgusted that my brain was stalled as well as the Manton, and so I gave up for a little while and wouldn't even answer the captain when he spoke to me.

"Oh, yes, we were pigs, both of us, he in his way and I in mine; and the sun went down

and down, and it didn't make me feel any better to think that I was smudged all over with grease, and that my hands and nails were something awful — while if ever there was a galley-slave at the oar, it was the Honorable John Vincent Cartwright cranking.

"We went on in this way till nearly four o'clock, when what should we hear coming along the road but a buggy, and who should be in that buggy but Gerard Malcolm with an actressy-looking girl! I wasn't over-pleased at the girl part of it, but it did my heart good to see Gerard. He drew up alongside the Manton and leaped out of the buggy, so splendid and handsome and cool and masterful, with a glisten in his eye which said: 'Bring on your gas-engine!' — that I loved him harder than ever, and could have almost torn the captain's ring off my finger. He didn't waste any time saying how-do-you-do, but just asked this and that and dived in. Then he pegged away for about five minutes, wiped his hands, took his hat that the captain had been holding, and said: 'Gears!'

"'It'll take me about two hours to break them loose,' he said, 'and so if Miss Stanton wouldn't mind trading escorts, and if the captain would take the buggy, I think Miss Hardy and I had better stay by the machine.'

"Miss Stanton didn't look nearly so pleased as the captain; but when Gerard said again he positively couldn't manage it under two hours, and I snubbed her when she proposed towing, and when the captain brightened up and made a good impression — he was so excited, poor fellow, at the chance of getting away — that it all came right, and they drove off cheerfully together. When they had quite disappeared, Gerard threw down the wrench he had in his hand, and said we'd now have that talk he had been trying to get with me for the past month.

"'We'll do the gears first, thank you,' I said.

"'Gears!' he exclaimed, 'there's nothing the matter with the gears. I thought you were chauffeur enough for that.'

"'But you said—' I began.

"'I can make this car move in five minutes,' he said, climbing into the tonneau and motioning with his hand for me to take the other seat.

"Of course I obeyed him. I didn't want to, but somehow when Gerard wants a thing I always do it. They say every woman finds her master, and though I hate to admit it even to myself, I suppose Gerard is mine. But I hid it all I could and I dare say I was pretty successful. It came all the easier because Gerard himself was kind of embarrassed, and he colored up and stammered while I sat in the tonneau, waiting for him to begin.

"'I thought you said you were going to talk,' I said.

"'Jess,' he said, 'my sister is going to get married.'

"Now, this was news, indeed. She was lots older than Gerard — forty years old, if a day — and a chronic invalid. I don't know exactly what was the matter with her, but she had a bad complexion, and used to stick pretty tight to the house, and was always absorbed

in church work. She had snappy black eyes, and Gerard couldn't call his soul his own. They kept house together, you know, and had been orphans ever since they were little.

"'Oh, married!' I said, pretending to be a little interested.

"'It's Mr. Simpson, the curate,' he said.

"It seemed rude to be too surprised, so I just rattled off some of the usual congratulations. Gerard didn't say a word. He simply looked and looked, and there was something beautiful to me in his shame and backwardness and hesitation.

"'It's very unexpected,' he blurted out at last. 'I thought I was going to take care of her always. It is going to make a great difference in my life.'

"'I know how you always devoted yourself to her,' I said.

"'I had made up my mind never to marry,' he went on. 'How could I marry? for it would have been like turning her out of doors. She was too ill and helpless and despondent to live by herself, and had I brought a third

person into the family it would have been misery all round.'

"Still I said nothing.

"'Jess,' he said suddenly, 'don't you understand? Can't you understand?'

"In fact, I did understand very well. It explained a heap of things — why he had always acted so strangely — sometimes so devoted to me, sometimes so distant; crazy to hold my hand one day and avoiding me the next. It was no wonder he had made me utterly desperate and piqued me into accepting the captain. Then he said: 'Jess, Jess!' like that; and 'for God's sake, was it too late?'

"I couldn't trust myself to speak and I could feel my lips trembling. I didn't sob or anything, but the tears just rolled down my cheeks. Wasn't it a dead give-away? It's awful to care for a man as much as that. I thought it was splendid of him that he didn't try to kiss me. He simply took my hand and pulled off the captain's ring and said I had to give it back to him at once. Then I broke down altogether and began to

cry like a baby, while Gerard got out and emptied the kerosene from the oil lamps into the exhaust valves. You see, pieces of scale from the inside of the cylinders had wedged against the exhaust-valve seats so that they wouldn't close tight, but leaked and leaked. Gerard said that new Mantons always feed too rich a mixture at first and that he knew what was the matter the moment he stuck his fingers in.

"We went home on the second speed so that Gerard could steer with one hand.

"Oh, the captain? He acted kind of miserable at first, and was awfully sarcastic about being a gentleman and not a gas-engineer. But I said the modern idea was to be both. He got himself transferred home and I really think it was the making of him — for what do you think happened last week? He won the non-stop London to Glasgow race on an eighteen horsepower Renault. I felt quite proud of him.

"He has asked Gerard and me and the Manton to spend a month with him in Eng-

land when we go abroad. He said I'd probably be pleased to hear that he had made a lovely garage out of his ancestral Norman chapel. But I suppose that was just his English humor, you know. Anyway, we are the best of friends, and if I ever see him again I'll give him a double toot on my French horn."

"And what became of the curate and Gerard's sister?"

"Oh, they married and went into steam."

THE GREAT BUBBLE SYNDICATE

I suppose it was a fool arrangement, but anyway we did it; and Harry Prentiss, who is learning how to be a corporation lawyer and has specialized on contracts, spent a whole week making it what he called iron-clad. When it was typewritten it covered nine pages, and was so excessively iron-clad that nobody could understand it but Harry. He said it undoubtedly covered the ground, however, and would be worth all the trouble it cost him in the friction it would save afterward. You'd hardly know Harry as the same boy that played Yale full-back, he's grown so cynical and suspicious, and he's got that lawyer way of looking at you now, as though you were a liar and he was just about to pounce on you with the truth. I thought he might have brought Nelly and himself into the

agreement under one head, considering he was engaged to her and they were only waiting to save a thousand dollars in order to get married; but he couldn't see it in that way at all, and spoke about people changing their minds, and how in law you must be prepared for everything (especially if it were disagreeable and unexpected) and put suppositious cases till Nelly broke down and cried.

They had got five hundred toward the thousand when they were both taken with automobile fever — and taken bad; and then they decided that, though marriage was all right, they were still young, and the bubble had the first call. Harry had been secretly taking the *Horseless Age* for three months, and as for Nelly — anybody with a four-cylinder tonneau could have torn her from her happy home. Not that she didn't love Harry tremendously. She was crazy about him — but crazier for a bubble. It's an infatuation like any other, only worse, and I guess I was no better than Nelly myself, for I used to ride regularly with Lewis Wentz —

and you know what Lewis Wentz is. And he only had a wheezy old steam carriage anyway, and sometimes blue flames would leap up all around you till you felt like a Christian martyr, and his boiler was always burning out when he'd try to hold my hand instead of watching the gage. You paid in every kind of way for riding with Lewis Wentz, and people talked about you besides — but I always went just the same. Oh, I know I ought to be ashamed to admit it, and I said to myself every time should be the last; yet he only had to double-toot at the front door for me to drop everything and run. This naturally made him awfully forward and troublesome, not to speak of complicating me with pa, who didn't approve of him the least bit, and who used to regale me with little talks beginning: "I would rather see you lying dead in your coffin," and winding up with, "Now, won't you promise your poor old dad?" till I was all broken up. But, as I said before, Lewis Wentz had only to toot for me to forget my old dad and the coffin and everything.

With only five hundred dollars to go on, Harry and Nelly, of course, had to look about for more capital; and that was why they chose me to go in with them. I didn't have any capital except a rich father, but I suppose they thought that was the same thing. People are so apt to — though I never found it the same thing at all. Then, too, Nelly and I were bosom friends, and they naturally wanted to give me the first chance. Their original plan had been to have the bubble held in four equal shares, taking in Morty Truslow as the fourth. I think there was a little scheme in that, too, for Morty and I hadn't spoken for three months, and it was all off between us. There was a time when I thought there was only one thing in the world, and that was Morty Truslow — but that was over for good, with nothing left of it but a great big ache. I can never be grateful enough to Mrs. Gettridge for putting me on to it, for, however much a girl cares for a man, her pride won't let her — and she was Josie's aunt, you know, and if anybody was

on the inside track, she was — and I cut him dead and sent back his letters unopened, though he wrote and wrote — and it was awfully hard, you know, because I just had to grit my teeth together to keep from loving him to death. Nelly said I was just too proud and silly for anything, and pa looked as depressed as though there was another slump in Preferred Steel, and mama said he was such a catch that the first designing girl would snap him up, and Harry said you wouldn't know Morty now, he was so changed and different.

So that was how it was when Nelly and Harry started the Great Bubble Syndicate and wanted to take Morty and me into it as quarter share-holders each. But I wouldn't have joined in a heavenly chariot on those terms, and so we talked and talked till finally Morty was eliminated and we settled on a two-third and one-third basis. The next point was to choose the car, for it had to be a cheap car and we wanted to get the very best for our money. Harry said the Model E

Fearless runabout at seven hundred and fifty was the bulliest little car on the market; and that the Fearless agent was so good and kind and looked so much like Henry Ward Beecher that you felt uplifted just to be with him; and that you knew instinctively that his car was sure to be the best car.

A picture of the Fearless settled the matter, for it was a real little beauty — long in the chassis and very low, with wood artillery wheels and guards and lamps thrown in for nothing. Harry said it had more power than it knew what to do with and was a bird on the hills, and that he had a friend who had a friend who owned one and swore by it. Afterward we met him and towed him nine miles, and what swearing he did was all the other way; however, I mustn't get ahead of the story, or anticipate, as they say in novels.

Getting two hundred and fifty dollars from pa was the next step, and of all my automobiling experiences it was certainly the worst. He couldn't see it at all, though I caught him after dinner and sat on the arm of his chair

and rubbed my cheek against his like the sunny-haired daughter on the stage.

He ought to have reciprocated by doing angel parent, but he talked horse-sense instead; how he couldn't afford to buy me a whole car, and how in his experience divided ownership always ended in the people hating one another ever afterward, and how dangerous automobiling was anyway, and how much nicer it would be to have a beautiful little horse.

Then I gave him the iron-clad agreement. He put on his spectacles and read it, asking me not to breathe on his neck, as it tickled him. (How different real life is from the stage!) And he began to giggle at the second page; at the third he could hardly go on; and finally, when mama came in and asked what was the matter, he couldn't speak at all, but got up and stamped about the room till you thought he was going to have a fit. Then he sat down again and wiped his eyes and asked as a favor whether he mightn't have a copy for himself. I said I might possibly

manage it if he would come down with the two hundred and fifty.

Then he got kind of serious again; asked if I didn't know any cheaper way of getting killed; said I might have appendicitis for the same money and be fashionable. When pa is in the right humor he can tease awfully, and that agreement had set him off worse than I had ever remembered. But I stuck to my bubble and wasn't to be guyed out of the idea, and finally he lit a cigar and started in to bargain.

Pa is the worst old skinflint in Connecticut, and never even gave me a box of peanut candy without getting a double equivalent. First of all, I had to give up Lewis Wentz entirely; I wasn't to speak to him, or bow or bubble or dance or anything. I put up a good fight for Lewis Wentz — not that I cared two straws for him, now that I was going to have an automobile of my own, but just to head pa off from grasping for more. I didn't want to be eaten out of house and home, you know, and I guess I am too much

pa's daughter to surrender more than I could help.

It was well I did so, for on top of that I had to promise never to ride in any car except my own, and then he branched off into my giving up coffee for breakfast, going to bed at ten, only one dance a week, wearing flannel in winter, minding my mother more, and Heaven only knows what all. But I said that Lewis Wentz alone was worth two hundred and fifty, and that I'd draw on the other things when I needed money for repairs. Then pa suddenly had a new notion and said he wanted to be in the thing, too; would take a quarter interest of his own; that we'd change the syndicate to fourths instead of thirds.

I was almost too thunderstruck to speak. Think of hearing pa saying he wished to buy in! It was like an evangelist wanting to take shares in the devil. I could only say "Pa!" like that, and gasp.

"I know I'm pretty old to change," he said. "But a fellow must keep up with the

procession, you know. And I always liked the way they smell."

His eyes were dancing and I saw he meant mischief; but, after all, the bubble was assured now, and that was the great thing. It wasn't till up to that moment that I felt really safe.

"I read here in the agreement," he went on, "that the automobile is taken in rotation by every member of the syndicate; and that when it's my day it's my day, and nobody can say a word or use it themselves, even if I don't care to."

"That's how we'll save any possibility of friction," I returned. "For instance, to-day it is absolutely my car; to-morrow it's yours; day after to-morrow it is Harry's; the day after that it's Nelly's — and if anything breaks on your day it's up to you to pay for it."

"Oh, I'm not going to break anything," said pa with the satisfied look of a person who doesn't know anything about it.

"Don't you be too sure about that," I said. "I've been around enough with Lewis Wentz to know better."

"Well, you see," said pa, "that depends on how much you use your automobile. If you never take it out at all you eliminate most of the bothers connected with it."

"Never take it out at all?" I cried.

"On my day it stays in the barn," he said.

I began to see now what he was smiling at. Wasn't it awful of him? He simply meant to tie it up for a quarter of the time.

"Now, Virgie," he said, "you mustn't think that I am not stretching a point to promise you what I have. It's too blamed dangerous and you're all the little girl I have. Well, if you must do it, I am going to cut the risk by twenty-five per cent. and *my* automobile days will be blanks."

I flared up at this. It's awful when your father wants to do something you're ashamed of. It was such a dog-in-the-manger idea, too, and so unsportsmanlike. But nothing could shake pa, though I tried and tried, and said things that ought to have pierced a rhinoceros. But pa ran for governor once, and his skin's thicker. I felt almost sorry we

hadn't taken in Morty Truslow instead — not really, you know, but just for the moment.

"How can I tell Harry and Nelly you're such a pig?" I said, half crying.

"I'm not a pig," said pa, "though now I'm the next thing to it — an automobilist. And, anyway, it's a straight business proposition. Take it or leave it."

"Pa," I said, "if you'll stay out of it altogether, I'll take it back about coffee for breakfast and not minding mama more."

"It's too late," he returned. "I've got the automobile fever now myself. For two cents I'd buy out Harry and Nelly and keep the red bug in the family."

Certainly pa has the most ingenious mind of anybody I know. He ought to have been in the Spanish Inquisition just to think up new torments. I don't wonder they like him so well on the Stock Exchange: he probably initiates new members and makes them ride goats. Anyway, nothing could change him about the automobile, and I closed the deal quick, lest he might carry out his other plan

and absorb seventy-five per cent. of the syndicate's stock.

The Fearless was even prettier than its picture, and there wasn't a runabout in town in the same class with it. Then our lessons began, which we took separately, because there was only room on the seat for two, and nobody wanted the other members of the syndicate to see him running into the curb or trying to climb trees. The agent turned out less like Henry Ward Beecher than Harry had thought, and it was sickening how he lost interest in us after he got his money. But he threw in a tooter for nothing and a socket-wrench, and in some ways lived up to the resemblance. He would not take me out himself, but gave me in charge of a weird little boy we called the Gasoline Child. The Gasoline Child was about thirteen, and was so full of tools that he rattled when he walked, and I guess his head rattled, too — he knew so much about gas engines. He was the

greasiest, messiest, grittiest and oiliest little boy that ever defied soap; and Harry always declared he was an automobile variety of coddling-moth or Colorado beetle or june-bug, who would wind up by spinning a cotton-waste cocoon in the center of the machinery and hatch out a million more like himself. Perhaps he was too busy to start his happy home, for I never saw him at the garage but his little legs were sticking out of a bonnet, and you could hear him hammering inside and telling somebody to "Turn it over, will you?" or "Now, try it that way, Bill."

But with all the heaps he knew, the Gasoline Child was a good deal like the man who got rich by never spending anything. His knowledge was imbedded in him like gold in quartz; you could see it there all right, but couldn't take it out. He tried so hard to be helpful, too; would plunge his little paw into the greasy darkness below the seat and say: "That's a nut you ought to remember now — it works on the babbitt of the countershaft" — or something of the kind — "and you

must see to it regular." Or, "Watch your valves, Miss, and be keerful they don't gum on you." Or, "Them commutators are often the seat of trouble, for oftentimes they wear down and don't break the spark right." When I'd grow dizzy with these explanations he would reassure me by saying that "I'd soon fall into it, like he did." But I didn't fall into it nearly so well as I could have wished. On the contrary, the more I learned the more intricate the whole thing seemed to grow, and I looked forward to taking the car out alone by myself with the sensations of a prisoner about to be guillotined. Not that I had lost heart in automobilism. The elation of those rides was delicious. The little car ran with a lightness that was almost like flying; it was as buoyant, swift and smooth as a glorified sledge; one awoke with joy to the fact that the world contained a new and irresistible pleasure.

The Gasoline Child soon taught me to run it for myself. With him by my side I was as brave as a lion, and I took the corners and

shaved eternity in a way to make him gasp. He said he had never been really scared in an automobile before, and he used to look at me with a ready-to-jump expression, as though I were a baby playing with a gun. You see, I had graduated on Lewis Wentz's steamer and a twenty-mile clip didn't feaze me any, though there were times when I'd forget which things to pull, and this always seemed to rattle his little nerves. It was strange, however, what a coward I was when I first went out by myself. There was no devil left in me at all, and I was certainly the crawly-crawliest bubbler you ever saw, and I teetered at street-car crossings till everybody went mad. It might have been worse than it was, though, for the only real trouble I had was chipping the tail off a milk wagon and ramming a silly horse on Eighth Avenue. When his friends helped him up (he had been standing still at the time, and I had forgotten the low gear always started with a jump) they said his front legs were barked five dollars' worth. I wouldn't have minded if *he* had got the five dollars,

poor thing, for after ramming him once I became confused at the notoriety I attracted, and, instead of reversing, I threw in the high-speed clutch and rammed him some more. Oh, yes, he had some right to have a kick coming, though all he did was to look at me reproachfully and then lie down. He was an Italian vegetable horse, and from the way his friends vociferated they must have thought a lot of him.

Of course, Harry and Nelly were taking their lessons, too, and getting into their individual scrapes in the intervals of my getting into mine. Pa was the only stock-holder who never came to time, though he used to walk round to the garage on his day to make sure the bubble was at home. He was awfully mean about his rights and explained the syndicate principle to Mr. Hoover, the head of the establishment, and tipped right and left, so that there shouldn't be any doubt about the blanks being blanks. I tried to bluff Mr. Hoover once and take out the car on pa's day, but I bumped into a regular stone wall. Pa

had given everybody there a typewritten schedule with his days marked in red ink, and the whole thing had become the joke of the garage, till even the wipers grinned when the foreman would call out: "Syndicate car there, for Miss Lockwood."

In fact, that car seemed to make everybody mean who was in the least way connected with it. I was a perfect pig myself, and Harry and Nelly were positively worse. It was one of our rules that the rider of the day should be answerable for any troubles or breakages that occurred when he (or she) was running the car. Naturally, there had to be some understanding of this kind, for personality counts a lot in automobiling, and often the chauffeur is more to blame than the machine. But it was awful what fibs it tempted us into, and how we were always "passing the buck," as they say in poker. Nelly got so treacherous that once she told me she didn't care to use the wagon that day, and would I like to? She had chewed up the bearings in a front wheel and if I hadn't suspected her generos-

ity and taken a good look beforehand it would have cost me six dollars!

I guess I wasn't any better myself, and quite a coolness sprang up all around.

The repair bills came to a good deal of money, and the eighteen dollars a month we paid at the garage was the least of the total. The Henry Ward Beecher agent had told Harry it cost a cent a mile to run a Fearless, but if he had said a dollar-eighty he would have been nearer the mark. Mr. Hoover said cheerfully he knew only one person who had got automobiling down to bed-rock, and that was pa! But for the rest of the syndicate it was their life's blood. It began to dawn on Harry and Nelly that they could never get married at all, as long as they stayed in the combine. It had cost them all the money they had saved to come in, and now it was taking every cent they had to stay in. Nelly used to cry about it, though I never noticed that it made any difference in her taking out the car, which she did regularly, and didn't let me ride with her unless I paid a dol-

lar each time in advance. She said she didn't know any other way of saving money.

Altogether, you wouldn't have known us for the same three people, we had all grown so horrid and changed and mercenary. Nelly was hankering to get married, while I was crazy to put in a radiator with a forced water circulation (ours was a silly old kind that boiled on you), and Harry wobbled one way and the other as though he couldn't make up his mind — sometimes agreeing with her, and sometimes frantic for a radiator. It looked as though the Fearless was going to make it a lifetime engagement, and Harry said ruefully that their marriage was not only made in Heaven, but would probably take place there. I should have felt sorrier for them if they hadn't been so horrid to me about it. From the way they talked, you'd think I had started the syndicate idea myself and had lured them into it against their own better judgment. They were nasty about pa, too, and said he was acting dishonorably with his blank days, and that as a new machine always

had to be broken in and notoriously cost more for repairs the first year than ever afterward, he was meanly benefiting himself at our expense. Harry called it pa's "unearned increment" and seemed to think it was an outrage.

They struck a whole row of troubles about this time, too—stripping a gear, losing a front wheel on the main street and winding up by fracturing the whole transmission into flinders. Nelly would hardly speak to me on the street, and the Gasoline Child told me they would be cheaply out of it at eighty dollars. Pa was the only person who didn't share the general depression. In fact, he never seemed to be so happy as when the car was stripped in the shop and sure to stay there. He used to go around there occasionally and tell them they needn't hurry — and they didn't!

The new transmission was of a better model than the old one, and I foresaw I might have trouble about it with the syndicate. It would be just like Harry to talk about "unearned

increment" and rope me in to pay part. But I still owed on my leather coat and wasn't in the humor to hand out a cent. What is the good of iron-clad agreements, anyway, if people don't live up to them — and as for the transmission, I was quite satisfied with the old one till they broke it. So when Nelly came around one night, all smiles and friendliness, I suspected trouble and didn't kiss her very hard back. But she was in too high spirits to notice anything, and hugged me and hugged me till I inwardly relented ten dollars' worth on the transmission — for Nelly and I had been good chums before we went into the syndicate, and there was a time when we would have shared our last chocolate cream.

"Virgie, you can't guess!" she exclaimed, her eyes dancing.

"The makers will do the right thing and won't charge for it?"

This brought her back again to earth at once.

"It — it isn't the transmission at all," she

said. "I am going to get married next month!"

"I thought they insisted that Harry had to save a thousand dollars first."

"He's got it! He's got it!" she cried delightedly.

I was nearly as happy as she was, for it had looked terribly hopeless up till then, what with all the money they had put into the syndicate and the way the bubble was gobbling us up.

"Oh, Nelly, I am so glad," I said. "I'll put in that forced water circulation at once, and I'll make your and Harry's share of it a wedding present!"

"Oh, I'm out of the syndicate," she said. "I guess we'd prefer something for the flat."

"Out of the syndicate?" I cried.

"Yes," she returned brazenly. "Sold out!"

It took me a moment to pull myself together. I felt premonitions running all over me. I didn't feel so enthusiastic about their marriage as I had at first thought I was.

"Oh, Virgie, darling, you won't hate me?" she asked.

"Not till I hear more about it," I said.

She thought to make it up by squeezing my hands. But it wasn't squeezing that I wanted, it was facts. I drew away a bit and waited for them.

"Losing that front wheel was bad enough," she said, "especially as I went over the dashboard in my dotted muslin and Harry has limped ever since; but when the transmission broke it seemed as though it was both our hearts. Harry said we had come to a place where we had to choose between owning an automobile or getting married. It was perfectly plain we couldn't do both. He said he didn't want to influence me either way, but that there was no good drifting on and on, deceiving ourselves and thinking it would all come out right. Of course, when he put it to me like that the bubble wasn't in it — and so we towed home for the last time and Harry went around to close out our interest in the syndicate."

She paused here and looked at me, quite frightened.

"Around where, exactly?" I demanded.

"Well," she went on, "your father was always dropping hints that he would buy us out at the price we paid, and so Harry went to his office and tried to make a deal. But your father said it wasn't reasonable to expect him to pay for the new transmission, too — and as Harry didn't want to, and couldn't, the whole thing hung fire till Harry ran into Morty Truslow on the street. Morty offered him a thousand dollars right off for his half-interest," continued Nelly; "you know how free-handed he is, and rich, and Harry just jumped at it and walked off with the check."

"But you only paid half of seven hundred and fifty dollars in the first place!" I exclaimed.

"Well, you see," said Nelly, "that car has gone up since. It's 'appreciated,' as Harry calls it. And just think what a fortune it has stood us in for repairs!"

"It's the most horrid, mean, treacherous

thing one person ever did to another!" I cried; "you know I wouldn't speak to Morty Truslow if he had the only monkey-wrench in the world and I was carbonized on a country road. I think you have acted detestably, and so has he, and I consider it downright caddish for him to buy a half-interest in anything I am connected with."

"Oh, Virgie, you don't know how bad he feels!" said Nelly. "He told me he had just been breaking his heart, and that you wouldn't answer his letters or anything, and if you would *only* let him talk for fifteen minutes he'd explain everything and you'd take him back."

"I won't take him back," I said.

"He wears a little flower you gave him next his heart," continued Nelly, "and when he speaks about you it is with tears in his eyes, and if you weren't made of flint and rock candy you'd feel so sorry for him you couldn't sleep!"

"What did he offer you to say all this, Nelly?" I demanded.

"Only a pearl horseshoe," she returned, quite unabashed. "Said I might choose it for myself at Helbe's if I could persuade you to give him a fifteen minutes' talk."

"I am sorry about the pearl horseshoe," I said ironically, "but you might as well give up the idea right now. And if he talked forty times fifteen minutes it wouldn't make the least difference in the world. He thinks he's so handsome and so well off and that so many girls are crazy about him that he only has to whistle for you to come!"

"If it wasn't for Harry — *I* would," she said; "that is, if he whistled loud enough and there wasn't too much of a crowd thinking he meant *them!* Oh, Virgie, it's just like Faversham to hear him talk, and I can't think how anybody could be such a little fool as to say no!"

"If you call that being a little fool I guess I am," I said, "though for a year he was the one man in my life, and if it hadn't been for Mrs. Gettridge — well, it's all off now, and it's going to stay off — and his owning half

the bubble won't make the least difference in the world!"

"But you'll come to my wedding and be one of the bridesmaids?" she pleaded. "And you won't blame me too much for getting out of the syndicate as I did? I knew it wasn't right and I felt awfully about it — but then, Harry and I couldn't have managed otherwise, and it takes years and years to save a thousand dollars!" She looked so sweet and pitiful and contrite as she said this that I forgave her everything and hugged her till she choked. It seemed a shame to spoil her happiness with reproaches, and I couldn't but think how I'd have felt myself if it had been Mor — Not that I cared a row of pins for him now, and would have despised myself if I did — but everybody has moments of looking back — and girls are such fools anyway. And, of course, deep down somewhere I was pleased that he still cared.

I felt quite twittery when I first went to

the garage after that, for I thought Morty might pop out at me from somewhere, and though I wasn't afraid to meet him and would have cut him if I had, it would inevitably be embarrassing and upsetting. But he had the good taste to stay away on my days, and I never saw as much as a pin-feather of him. But he was awfully artful, even if he didn't let himself be seen, and the things he did to the car went straighter to my heart than any words he could have spoken. He put in a radiator, a new battery with a switch, three twisted cowhide baskets, two fifty-dollar acetylene lamps, an odometer, a spark gap, a little clock on the dashboard, and changed the tooter for a splendid French horn. My repair bills, too, stopped as though by magic, and the bubble ran so well I guess people must have sat up nights with it! The engine would start at the half-turn of the crank; the clutches were adjusted to a hair; she speeded up to twenty now on the open throttle, which she had never done before except in the advertisement; she was the show-

iest, smartest, fastest little car in town, and when she miraculously went into red leather, edged with gold stampings, people used to fall over one another on the street. I believe those two months were the happiest months of my life. It was automobile Heaven, and if it hadn't been for pa's blanks and Morty's half-interest I should have been deliriously happy every day instead of every fourth.

I can't think how it happened, but finally I got confused and lost count. I had been away at my grandmother's for a week and somehow that threw me out. But it was a Thursday afternoon, I remember, and a beautiful autumn day, and I walked along to the garage with that delicious feeling of anticipation — that tingle of happiness to come — that made my heart bound with love of the little red wagon. (The horse, for all his prancing and social position, never roused a sensation like that and never will.) I dodged a big touring-car coming out, and then went in on the floor to order my car. I was just telling Bert to get it out when I turned

around, and there was Morty sitting in it not four feet away from me. He had his cap on and his leather coat, and I saw at once that I had made a terrible mistake. Before I could even think what to do he saw my predicament and leaped out, insisting that I should take his place. I murmured something about being sorry and tried to move away, but he caught my arm and wouldn't let go. He was so eager and excited and made such a scene that I allowed myself to be bundled into the car rather than attract everybody's attention — for there was a Packard and a waterless Knox looking on. Bert started up the engine and I was just engaging the low-gear clutch, when Morty gave me such a look that I stopped dead. It seemed too horribly mean to rob him of his afternoon — besides, when you've been awfully in love with a man — and his face —

"Mr. Truslow," I said, speaking loud, so as not to be drowned by the engine, "if you promise on your honor not to speak a single word to me — you can come, too!" I had

to say it twice before he understood, and then, didn't he bound in! I suppose it was an awfully reckless thing to do, for whatever they say about absence making the heart grow fonder, sitting close is lots more dangerous, and I began to feel all my pride and determination oozing out of my shoes. It came over me in waves that I loved him better than ever, and I stole little sidewise peeps at him — and every peep seemed to make it worse. He belonged to a splendid type — I had to admit that, even if I didn't forgive him — big, clear-eyed, ruddy and broad-shouldered — and there was something tremendously compelling and manly about him that seemed to sweep me off my feet. This only made me hate him more, for I didn't see how I could ever love anybody else, and it's dreary for a girl to have only a single man in her life and not even be on speaking terms with that one! It leaves her with no outlook or anything, and one might as well be dead right off. But you can't be long miserable in a bubble, even if you try — that is, if it is running nicely, de-

veloping full power and you have a fat, rich spark — and though I looked as cold and distant as I could, secretly I think I never was so happy in my life.

Morty behaved properly for quite a while — much longer, in fact, than I could have believed possible. Then he brought out a pencil and began to write things on the back of an envelope. I never moved an eyelash and didn't seem to understand at all till he handed me what he had written. I promptly tore it up and threw it away. But he found another envelope and did it again, this time holding to it tight and moving it before my eyes. I nearly ditched the car, for I was running with an open throttle and the grade was in our favor. Then he bent over and kissed my cloth sleeve. I pulled up short and gave him his choice of either getting out or comporting himself like a civilized being. He indicated that he would try to do the latter, though he looked awfully savage and folded his arms, and moved as far away from me as the seat would allow. I didn't care —

besides he was safer like that than when he was nice — and so I just looked cross, too, and speeded up.

I laid out about a twenty-five mile spin, cutting Deering Avenue midway, and branching off where the Italians are working at the new trolley, toward Menlo, Hatcherly and the road through the woods. We turned at the Trocadero, climbed the long hill, and took the river-drive home. You know how steep it is, the river miles below and nothing but the sheerest wall on the other side. But there is no finer road in Europe, and it's straight enough to see everything ahead, so you are free to coast as fast as you please. I let her out at the top, for I knew my breaks had been taken up, and there were cotter pins in every bolt of the steering gear; and, as I said before, there was always plenty of room to pull up in if you happened to meet a team. Well, off we went with a rush that made our ears sing, the little car humming like a top.

When we were more than two-thirds down and going like the wind I saw a nurse-girl

near the bottom pushing a baby in a baby-carriage and coming uphill, with two little tots in red dresses walking on either side of her. They saw us the same moment we saw them and lined up against the side — very sensibly, as I thought — and it was all so plain and right that I held on without a thought of danger. When I was about ten yards from them and allowing them an ample four feet to the good — I mean from the steep side, where they stuck in a row like barnacles — what did the little idiots do but rush across the road like a covey of partridges, while the nurse-girl stayed where she was with the baby! If ever a person's blood ran cold it was mine. There was no time, no room, no anything — and the bubble going at forty miles an hour! It seemed like a choice between their lives or our own. But, thank God, I was game, and I just screamed out the one word "jump!" to Morty and turned the machine over the edge. I must have jumped, too, though I have no recollection of it, for when I came to myself my head was lying on

Morty's knee and on looking about I saw we were still on the road. The machine? Oh, it was two hundred feet below, smashed to smithereens, and if we both hadn't lit out like lightning —

I wasn't a bit hurt, only bruised and giddy, and Morty was throwing the baby's milk in my face to revive me, while the baby looked on and roared with displeasure at its being wasted. Morty wasn't hurt, either, and if there were ever two people well out of a bad scrape it was he and I. He had been so frightened about me he was crying; and I guess his tears were like the recording angel's, because they seemed to blot out all the old quarrel between us. At least, when we got up and began to limp home it seemed to me I didn't mind anything so long as he was close to me. He was shameless enough to kiss me right before the nurse-girl, who was demanding our names and addresses and our blood — and all I did was to kiss back. I didn't have any fight left, and for once he had everything his own way. Of course, it

didn't last long — it wouldn't have been good for him if it had — but even in six minutes I managed to lose the results of six months' coldness. Yet I was glad it was gone; glad just to be alive; and we'd look at each other and laugh like children. You don't realize what a good old place the world is until you've taken a chance on leaving it and weighed against death itself; all our little jealousies and misunderstandings seemed too trivial to count. It seemed enough that I loved him and that he loved me and that neither of us had broken anything — bones, I mean. It was sad, though, to think the poor little bubble was a goner and that we'd never hear its honest little pant again.

"If we had lived up to the comic papers, Morty," I said, "we would have spiflicated a red child, given a merry toot and disappeared in a cloud of dust!"

"I'm almost sorry we didn't," said Morty, who was dreadfully pale and always hated walking. "We'll know better next time."

"There'll be no next time for that bubble,"

I said sadly. "It's sparked its last spark and will never choo-choo again!"

"I mean our next car, of course," said Morty (it was awfully sweet to hear him say "our." And it took the sting out of losing the little bubble, especially now that we're going to have another).

"Yesterday Forbes Mason offered me his new four-cylinder Lafayette for twenty-eight hundred dollars," said Morty; "it's only been run five hundred miles, and I told him I'd think about it."

"It's suspiciously cheap," I said. "Sure he hasn't cut the cylinders?"

"Well, you see, he broke his arm cranking. It back-fired on him, and his wife is such a little fool that he had to promise to give up automobiling."

"They are splendid cars, with a record of fifty miles on the track, unstripped and out of stock!"

"And you shall have half-interest in it, Virgie!"

"I never could pay fourteen hundred dol-

lars, Morty, and I don't want any more of pa's blanks. It's too exasperating."

"Oh, I meant for nothing!"

"Then it's a present — and there's always a string to your presents."

"Isn't there to everybody's?"

"Besides, it's an air-cooled motor," I said, not wanting to appear too eager. "Don't they always overheat in time and stick the pistons?"

"Not the Lafayette!"

"Don't tempt me," I said. "You know I couldn't take it on any terms."

"Forced feed lubrication and direct drive on the fourth speed," he continued, like a stage villain offering diamonds to the heroine.

"What kind of a string?"

"Oh, Virgie, it was all a lie about Josie Felton."

"I had it straight from Mrs. Gettridge and she's Josie's aunt and she ought to know, I guess."

"Mrs. Gettridge is a social assassinator — belongs to a regular Mafia of mischief-makers

and old cats — you know you used to care once."

"Oh, I did, Morty, I did. It nearly broke my heart, and I just wanted to throw myself away — become a trained nurse or go in for settlement work!"

"Couldn't it ever be as it used to be?"

"I should want all the bushings of phosphor bronze."

"They are that already — and it's patent-lock nutted throughout, and the engine is that new kind that interlocks. I'll draw it for you when I get home . . . and we'll be married at the same time as Harry and Nelly."

"And one of those French brass gasoline tanks that set flat against the dash-board and hold a two-gallon extra supply."

"You shall have it!"

"But she said she had actually seen the letter!"

"It was all a lie, every word of it," he broke out. "We'll go straight to her now if you like and have it out, and then you'll

see whom to believe! There never was any letter or anything, except that she made up her mind I was to have her niece whether I wanted to or not. I told you that fifty million times in the letters you wouldn't read and sent back unopened. And it wasn't the kind of message I could give anybody else to take to you. I had to think of the girl, of course, and I know she liked me."

"French tires, of course?"

"Every blessed thing just the way you want it. The only thing I can't see my way to change is the chauffeur, a poor devil named Truslow, who's really an awful decent kind of fellow when you get to know him!"

"Oh, dear," I said, "I never dreamed the Great Bubble Syndicate was going to end like this!"

"End?" cried Morty, putting his arm around my waist as though he now had a right to. "It's only the reorganization of a splendid old concern, and for fourteen hundred kisses I am going to let you in on the ground floor!"

COAL OIL JOHNNY

It was eleven o'clock in the forenoon, and on the veranda of Mrs. Hemingway's house three young girls were gathered in conversation. Below them a garden ran to the water's edge and gave access to a wooden pier projecting some thirty or forty feet beyond. Here, in a mimic harbor formed by a sharp turn of the shore and a line of piles on which the pier was supported, rode the Hemingway fleet at its moorings: a big half-decked catboat, a gasoline launch, an Indian canoe and two trim gigs. Here, too, under the kindly lee of a small boat-house, the Hemingway crew lay stretched in slumber, his head pillowed on an ancient jib, and his still-smoking pipe fallen from his unconscious lips. A Hemingway puppy was stalking some Hemingway tomtits, in the bland,

leisurely, inoffensive manner of one whose intentions were not serious; and the picture was completed by a Hemingway cat, with a blue ribbon round its neck, which was purring to itself in a serenity that a stray page of a Sunday supplement never yet afforded man.

The wide, shady veranda was articulate of summer and girls and gaiety, and of all that pleasant, prosperous American homeliness that we see so much of in life and hear so little about in fiction. Hammocks, rocking-chairs and rugs were scattered about in a comfortable, haphazard fashion; a tea-table here was stacked high with novels and magazines; a card-table there bore a violin, a couple of tennis racquets, a silver-handled crop and a box of papa's second-best cigars. (The really-truly best were under the basket-work sofa.) There was also a sewing-machine, a music-stand, a couple of dogs asleep on the floor, a family Bible full of pressed wild flowers, a twenty-two-bore rifle, and the messy remains of a Latin exercise that the

son of the house had recently been engaged upon before being called away to play Indian.

Dolly Hemingway, a handsome, fair-haired, imperious-looking girl, was lolling in a hammock, directing the deliberations of Sattie Felton, aged seventeen, who was sitting on the floor holding a dog's head in her lap, and of Grace Sinclair, aged twenty, who was in possession of a stool and a box of chocolate creams. A very important matter was being discussed, and that was why everybody was talking at once, and how it came about that a young man passed unnoticed through the cool darkened rooms of the house and appeared without warning before the little group — a tall, bulky young man, with an air of diffidence on his honest, sunburned face, and a general awkwardness of movement that seemed to betray a certain doubt as to his welcome. He stammered out something like "Good morning," and then stood there, hat in hand, waiting for the massacre to begin.

"Mr. Bassity!" exclaimed Dolly Hemingway, straightening up in the hammock, and

staring at him with cold gray eyes. The bulky young man halted, tried to find some reassurance in the no less chilling faces of Sattie Felton and Grace Sinclair, and then said, "How do you do!" in a voice of extreme dejection.

"It is the custom here," said Dolly in cutting accents, "for a gentleman, when he calls upon a lady, to announce himself first at the door —"

"And be told she's out," said Mr. Bassity, timidly defiant. "Call next day, and out, too! Call next week and still out!"

"When you make a closer study of the social system," began Miss Hemingway — "*our* social system, which seems in vogue everywhere except the place *you* came from — you will discover that such little subterfuges save painful interviews."

"Oh, now, girls, don't be hard on me," said Mr. Bassity, sitting down uninvited and speaking with the most disarming contrition. "We all used to be such good friends once, and now, for the life of me, I don't know

what's the matter. I valued your friendship tremendously — valued it more than I can tell, and now I am losing it without even knowing why. It cuts a fellow; it's humiliating; it is crool, that's what it is, awful crool, and I'll tell you the straight-out truth that I've cried over it!"

He looked quite capable of crying over it again, and his honest, manly face bore mute witness to his words. Though addressing himself to Miss Hemingway, his eyes were more often fixed on Grace Sinclair, and it was plain that it was her good opinion he valued most. But she was as merciless as Dolly, and showed not the least sign of relenting.

"We have decided that we do not care for the further pleasure of your acquaintance," said Miss Hemingway. "It's a disagreeable thing to have to say — but it's the truth! We liked you at first because there was something breezy and Western about you; then you got breezier and Westerner till it was more than the traffic could stand."

"Now see here," broke out Mr. Bassity in pleading accents, "have I ever done anything caddish or ungentlemanly — intentionally, I mean — anything that could possibly justify my being dropped like this — that could —"

"Perhaps not intentionally," interrupted Miss Hemingway, "though it's no good your coming around here to say you didn't know any better. You ought to have known better, that's all."

"Known what?" bleated Mr. Bassity. "In Heaven's name, tell me *what?*"

"Oh, it isn't one thing — it's a thousand," said Dolly. "It's — it's — general social ineptitude!"

Mr. Bassity looked more depressed than ever. He didn't know what the word meant, and it seemed to cover a terrifying accusation. He was seen silently making a note of it for a future reference to a dictionary.

"I'm just a rough, uncouth fellow," said he at last. "I know that well enough without three young ladies' telling me so. An

oil man — a successful oil man — hasn't much chance to cultivate the social graces. If he can keep on the right side of common honesty he has done more than most. I guess even our best people out there would give you a shock — and I don't pretend I even ran with them!"

"That's the most redeeming thing you've said yet," remarked Grace.

"Oh, they wouldn't have me," remarked Coal Oil Johnny with fatal truthfulness.

"All you need is toning down," said Miss Hemingway, with a suspicion of kindness in her voice. "You're too exuberant, that's all. You're always rushing in where angels fear to tread, till it has grown on you like a habit. When other people stop you're just beginning!"

"Couldn't you give me another chance?" he asked, still with his eyes pathetically on Grace Sinclair's face. "Just one more chance to try and hit it off better next time? Now, just sit up, every one of you, and tell me frankly what I've done to offend you —

stamp all over me — bite my head off — and then let's begin again with a clean slate, and see if I can't buck up."

"I'll leave it to the general vote," said Miss Hemingway. "You certainly have a very winning nature in some ways — and who knows? — you might possibly do better after this awful warning. Only you mustn't come round here next time demanding explanations. The next time will be positive and final. Yes," she went on, "I propose that Mr. Bassity be given a good talking to, and then have his name put on the probation list."

"Poor Mr. Bassity!" said Sattie Felton. "I second the motion for reinstating him temporarily!"

Grace Sinclair was not so quick in giving her decision. In her girlish heart she enjoyed the big man's discomfiture, and was mischievous enough to prolong his suspense. She knew that to him her opinion was the most important of all, and this gave her an added pleasure in withholding her verdict. All three looked at her as she bent her pretty

brown head and seemed to weigh the question. She was a Southerner, and her French-Spanish blood betrayed itself in her grace, her slender hands and feet, and the type of her dark and unusual beauty. She was more a woman than either Dolly or Sattie, and the fact that Mr. Bassity was desperately in love with her fanned within her breast a wilful desire to torment him.

"Let me think!" she said.

"'Pon my soul!—" began that unfortunate young man, boisterously attempting to sway her judgment.

"Hush!" exclaimed Sattie Felton.

"She's thinking," said Miss Hemingway severely.

Mr. Bassity noisily subsided.

"I don't know whether it's worth while to forgive him," said Grace at last. "He's so incorrigible — so wild and woolly — that if you're nice to him he's like one of those dogs that want to jump all over you!"

"Oh, Miss Sinclair, please, please—!" cried Coal Oil Johnny.

"Well, I won't hang the jury," continued Grace; "only it must be clearly understood that we have the privilege of making a few remarks."

Mr. Bassity made a pantomime of baring his breast.

"Strike!" he said.

"You first," said Dolly to Grace.

"Last Tuesday I was playing golf at the links," began that young lady vindictively. "Mr. Bassity volunteered to call for me at four and take me home in his French automobile. I knew we were going too fast and said so twice, but he only answered, 'Oh, bother!' or something equally polite and gracious. Then as we raced into Franklin Street we found a rope across it and sixteen policemen waiting to arrest us! Pleasant, wasn't it? — with a million people looking on, and my picture next day in the paper. I was so mortified I could have cried, and I can't think of it even now without burning all over."

"Perhaps the prisoner might care to offer

some explanation?" suggested Miss Hemingway.

"Well, really, it was most unfortunate," admitted Coal Oil Johnny. "The fact is, the low gear is chewed up on that car, and I've always been forced to run it on the intermediate — and the most you can throttle down the intermediate to is eighteen miles an hour!"

"The legal speed being eight, I believe," icily interjected Miss Sinclair.

"I don't know what the silly law is," continued Mr. Bassity, "but the only way to obey it would be to get out and push the car. Couldn't ask a lady to do that, could I?"

"You could have thrown in your intermediate and then thrown it out again, and run on momentum," said Miss Sinclair. "That's automobile A B C!"

"Oh, but my dear girl," protested Coal Oil Johnny, "the clutches on that car are something fierce, and half the time the intermediate won't mesh. When you're lucky enough to get it in, of course you keep it in."

"Yes, and get arrested," said Miss Sin-

clair, "and give your passenger some disagreeable notoriety, not to speak of shaking up her happy home and getting her allowance stopped for a month."

Mr. Bassity looked acutely miserable. To have brought penury to his lady-love struck him to the heart.

"I'm the most wretched fellow alive," he said. "If ever there was a child of misfortune, it's me. I can only throw myself on the mercy of the court and grovel — yes, grovel — if you'll show me a place to grovel and teach me how!"

"Have you anything else against the prisoner?" inquired Miss Hemingway of Grace.

"About sixty-five other complaints," assented that young lady. "But I'll let it go at this, which was the worst of all."

"Miss Sattie Felton, what have *you* against the unhappy wretch who stands trembling at the bar of justice?" asked the self-appointed president of the court.

"Last Sunday I was at the Country Club with papa," said Miss Felton. "The pris-

oner engaged in an altercation with my male parent on the subject of religion, said parent being a man of strong views and short temper. Said parent, however, being a man of the world as well, tried to evade an argument and escape, but was penned up in a corner for ten purple minutes. Said afterward that he had never been so affronted in all his life; explodes even now at the recollection; calls the prisoner a word that begins with a B, contains a double O and ends with R!"

At this staggering blow poor Coal Oil Johnny covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"It's all true," he said, "only I was kind of goaded into it. It began by my saying that if religious people would only be Christians, too, the world would be a better place to live in!"

"The court is now going to get in its own little knife," said Miss Hemingway. "The court, in a moment of generous weakness, verging on imbecility, invited, or, rather,

caused to be invited, the prisoner to dinner. Prisoner, through the absence of one lady from the party, was placed next to a distinguished young sociologist. Of course, in his usual headlong and unrestrained manner, the prisoner had to teach the distinguished young sociologist a thing or two he didn't know about sociology. Roared at him! Yes, ladies of the jury, positively roared at him, and beat on the table, extra, with his fist!"

"But he was such an ass!" said the prisoner.

"No reason at all why you should roar at him," said the court, "and disturb everybody and make them feel uncomfortable."

"An awful ass!" persisted the prisoner.

"The world is full of them," said the court. "If you were to roar at every one you meet you'd never have time for anything else. Life would degenerate into one long roar. Everybody knows that Professor Titcombe is a ninny and an idiot, but the decencies of intercourse require you to say, 'How nice!' or 'How interesting!' to his remarks.

"But he had never even been in Colorado," vociferated Coal Oil Johnny. "It was all lies and hearsay and gas. But *I* have, and I know all about it, and if you want proof I have a scar on my head where a dago shot me at Telluride!"

"Prisoner's motion to show scar overruled," said the court.

"Isn't it about time to let me off?" pleaded Mr. Bassity. "Surely I've listened like a lamb to everything you've said to me? I've been slapped on one cheek and then on the other, and if I haven't always come up smiling it isn't that I haven't tried. It stings a fellow to hear such things to his face; it hurts a fellow more than I think you know; for I may not be up to the general standard of your friends, but I guess my feelings are just as sensitive, and my regard and respect for all three of you is not a whit behind theirs. I dare say this has amused you very much, and I don't grudge for a minute the fun you've had out of it — but suppose we call it off now and be friends again, and —

and — talk about something else!" He looked earnestly from one to another.

There was something so naïve and affecting in Bassity's plea for mercy that for a moment his three persecutors looked almost ashamed of themselves. Grace Sinclair's eyes filled with tears, and she rose and went over to him and patted his hand.

"Cheer up," she said, smiling. "We've reinstated you now, and like you better than we ever did before."

"And oo'll be mamma's little darling and will never be naughty again?" added Miss Hemingway.

"Poor old Johnny!" said Miss Felton sympathetically; "that's the trouble about being a rough diamond and being polished while you wait — makes you sorry you ever came, doesn't it?"

"Now you can smoke a cigar, Mr. Bassity," said Dolly, "and improve your mind listening to us talk!"

"So long as I'm not the subject of it," observed Coal Oil Johnny ruefully.

"Oh, we can't bother about you for always," said Miss Hemingway. "You've had your little turn and must now give way to something more important!"

"Delighted!" said Mr. Bassity.

"And don't look as though your own cigars were better than papa's," added Dolly.

"But they are," he retorted.

"Will nothing ever prevent your speaking the truth?" cried Miss Sinclair. "There ought to be tracts about the young man who always spoke the truth — and his awful end!"

"Do you want me to listen intelligently or unintelligently?" Mr. Bassity asked Dolly.

"Oh, any old way," she said. "We don't mind particularly which."

"But you might tell me what the next topic's about," he said. "It might improve my mind more, you know, to have some glimmering of what's going on. Possibly — I say it with all diffidence — possibly I might be able to contribute some valuable suggestions."

At this there arose such a chorus of in-

credulity that even the dogs jumped up and barked.

"It'll be a long time before you'll ever pay your social way," said Miss Hemingway cruelly. "In the meanwhile you're a social pauper, living on crusts, and the most becoming thing you can do is to sit very silent and grateful and self-effacing."

"Yep," said Coal Oil Johnny, pretending to gulp down a manly emotion. "Yep, kind lady, and God bless your purty face, and if a lifetime of humble devotion and —"

"We all three have to do something for the St. John's Home for Incurable Children," interrupted Dolly, "and the question is, what?"

"Simplest thing out," said Mr. Bassity, feeling for his pocketbook.

"That's just what we're not going to do," continued Dolly. "It's horrid to go around dunning people for subscriptions, and being ten dollars nice to them for three dollars and fifty cents cash. We're all pledged to earn some money — really, truly earn it — and

every one of us is going to get out and hustle, and, of course, we want to arrange it so that none of us three will overlap. My own idea is dog-thinning!"

"Dog-*what?*" ejaculated Coal Oil Johnny.

"Most people's dogs are too fat," explained Miss Hemingway. "Most owners are so slack and good-natured that, though they know they are their own dogs' worst enemies, they weakly go on pampering them in spite of their better judgment. I am going to reduce dogs for ten dollars a dog — not brutally, like a vet., who kicks them into a cellar and leaves them there — but giving up my whole time to it for a month. Plain living, lots of exercise, sympathy, tact, and all the comforts of home! I've already got the promise of four, and there's a Russian poodle, besides, and a dachshund, who are trying to make up their minds."

"I wish I could have thought of anything so original," cried Sattie Felton mournfully. "It seems so commonplace just to work in papa's office for two weeks, doesn't it?"

"'Specially the way you'll work!" exclaimed Grace Sinclair.

"I am going to help Miss Drayton in the filing department," said Sattie. "Put a letter from an F man into an F drawer, and from a G man into a G drawer, and from an H man into an H drawer, and from an I man into an I drawer —"

"Oh, stop!" cried Dolly Hemingway, warningly.

"And from a J man into a J drawer," continued Sattie drearily, "and from a K man into —"

The hurried passing of the chocolate creams in her direction brought about a welcome silence.

"What's your plan, Miss Sinclair?" inquired Mr. Bassity.

"Oh, Grace has a snap," said Sattie in thick, chocolate-cream accents.

"My Despardoux car!" exclaimed Grace. "It holds five, you know, and I'm going every day to the I. B. & Q. depot and take passengers. Hang out a little card: Beautiful

Stackport, Two Hours' Ride for One Dollar; Children Half-Price!"

"No chauffeur?" asked Coal Oil Johnny.

"Of course not. In that case it would be the money *he* earned — not mine!"

"I don't think I'd do that," said Coal Oil Johnny.

"It matters so little what you think!" said Grace.

"But all alone?" objected Bassity.

"I told you it holds five," said Miss Sinclair.

"I shall make it a point to go every trip," said Coal Oil Johnny.

"Indeed you shan't," protested Grace. "The basis of the whole idea is that no friends are allowed. It's to be genuine money-making without favoritism or the personal element, and I think it's splendidly original and American."

Coal Oil Johnny looked at her and slowly shook his head.

"Don't do it," he said seriously. "Please don't do it."

"But I please will, thank you," she returned; "and I'm going to make more money out of it than anybody."

"What does your father say?" he asked.

"Offered me a hundred dollars not to!"

"Then I suppose it wouldn't be any good offering two hundred."

"Not in the least — nor two thousand!"

Coal Oil Johnny sighed, and puffed away at his cigar.

"See here," he said at last, "why wouldn't it be a bright idea to give me lessons — at so much a lesson — on how to behave, and that kind of thing!"

Sattie Felton clapped her hands together excitedly.

"I take him, I take him!" she cried. "I spoke first, girls, and it beats filing all hollow." In her eagerness she jumped up and ran to Coal Oil Johnny, as though to hold him tight and prevent his being snatched away from her by the others. Poor Bassity had hoped to fall into other hands, and his face showed his disappointment.

"I hoped —" he stammered. "I thought perhaps —"

"No, Sattie spoke first," said Miss Hemingway, detecting incipient rebellion, "and, anyway, she deserves to have you, for her plan wasn't any good and was hardly better than getting a present of the money from her father!"

"What can I charge him?" exclaimed Sattie. "What are lessons worth, Dolly — good long ones?"

"Five dollars each, or fifty for a course of twelve," replied that reliable authority. "Diploma, elegantly tinted for framing, one dollar!"

"It isn't too much, is it?" asked Sattie anxiously of Mr. Bassity. "I don't want to rob you, you know, and even half would be more than I could get by filing."

"Oh, it's cheap," said Coal Oil Johnny, attempting to seem cheerful. "I never expected to become a social favorite for anything under a hundred. Only I wish you wouldn't try your way," he added aside to

Miss Sinclair. "I mean it in all earnestness. If I had a sister — "

"You'd keep her in a red morocco case, and only show her in peeps to people of guaranteed respectability," said Grace, continuing his sentence for him. "That's always the way with imaginary sisters. But the real ones like to jump in and help the old world along!"

"Oh, but do take a chauffeur," he pleaded.

Miss Sinclair gave him a mocking smile.

"Would you mind my running my own little show in my own little way?" she observed sweetly.

He blew out a large smoke-ring and did not reply. His honest, sunburned face assumed a far-away expression. Coal Oil Johnny was thinking!

In the line of cabs and omnibuses that stood outside the I. B. & Q. depot was a Despardoux car, dazzling the eye with brass, and reflecting the passing throng in the deep, ruby

red of its highly polished surface. Its only occupant was Miss Grace Sinclair, suffocating in a leather coat, and with her shy, pretty face well concealed behind an automobile mask. At the side of the car, neatly pinned to one of the long rawhide baskets, was the following invitation to the public:

BEAUTIFUL STACKPORT
TWO HOURS' RIDE FOR $1
CHILDREN ½ PRICE

But the public who had possibly already seen beautiful Stackport for themselves, or who, maybe, were withheld by the lack of the necessary dollar — the public, jostling past in an intermittent stream, and coy as always in the investment of its cash, disregarded the allurements of the Despardoux, and scarcely deigned even to look its way. A few of its members, however, of a chatty and mechanical turn, were willing to volunteer a vast deal of random conversation with less than no encouragement; but the man with the dollar, the man who desired to see beautiful Stackport,

the man who thirsted for a two hours' ride — children half-price — was yet to come.

Grace Sinclair had waited an hour. Her first eager expectancy had given way to a heartbreaking consciousness of failure. She felt herself humiliated, less for herself than for her Despardoux. She had thrown down her pearls, and the swine (true to tradition) were treating them in the time-honored manner. At last, when hope was nearly dead within her breast, it was suddenly revived by the appearance of a rustic gentleman, who, stopping as though he had received a galvanic shock, opened his mouth as he slowly spelled out the notice on the basket. It was plain he was from the country, for his reddish whiskers were untrimmed, his hair long and straggling, his clothes of an extraordinary and antique design; and, moreover, under his arm he carried a coal-oil box, slatted across the front, which contained a live rooster. It was a pity that so sturdy a representative of the agricultural classes should have worn spectacles, and blue ones at that,

and he had a troubled, peering, blind look that caused Grace a momentary pang. But he seemed a jolly, hearty fellow in spite of his infirmity, and coming up to her he gave her a broad and confidential smile.

"About this burd," he began, in a rich, friendly drawl, indicating the rooster. "Be there any trouble about the burd coming, too?"

"Not a particle," said Miss Sinclair.

"Hey?" said the stranger. "Hey?"

"Glad to have it," said Miss Sinclair, trying to suit her English to the intelligence of the plain people.

"But no monkey business?" said the gentleman from the country. "No half-price rung on me later? No extry for live stock?"

"One dollar, and no charge for rooster," said Grace in her most matter-of-fact tones.

From a capacious and inner pocket the stranger produced a venerable wallet, and from the venerable wallet a dollar bill.

"A lot of money for just whizzing through the air," he remarked genially, handing it to

her. "I could fall off my barn for nothing, and as like as not be less hurt than when you've got through with me!"

"I'll get you back all right," said Miss Sinclair.

The stranger showed symptoms of wanting to climb into the tonneau by way of the mud-guard; and his enthusiasm was unbounded when he was directed to the door.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, seating himself luxuriously on the cushions. "Gosh! but they've got these things down fine! I never read the *Poultry Gazette* of a Saturday night without saying to myself, what next? Every day some new way of being killed, or some old way improved! My! but this is the dandiest of all!"

"There isn't the least danger if people are careful," said Grace, gazing out of the corner of her eye at three very loud and offensively jocular young men, their straw hats tilted at the back of their heads, who had also been arrested by the notice on the basket. They were flashily dressed, with race-tout written

all over them, and their keen, impudent, tallowy faces filled her with sudden misgiving.

"Let's try the old hell-wagon," said one.

"If people are only careful," repeated Grace forlornly.

"I dug four automobeelists out of a ditch once," observed the rural gentleman. "One had his leg broke, and the others were scratched something awful — but perhaps they weren't careful!"

"Say, we want to see beautiful Stackport," said one of the touts, clambering into the front seat beside Grace.

"Get out of that and give your place to a handsomer man," cried another, trying to pull him out by the legs.

The scuffle ended in the triumph of number one, who turned to Grace and addressed her in a hoarse, ironical voice.

"Never you mind them," he said. "They're only a pair of cheap skates who've won out a little on the track, and are blowing it in."

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" exclaimed another,

poking his fingers through the bars at the rooster.

"Wind her up, young chafer!" exclaimed the third.

"The fare is one dollar in advance," said Grace Sinclair, whose heart was sinking within her.

Then there ensued a humorous altercation in which they tried to beat her down to seventy-five cents. But Grace, remaining firm, finally received her three dollars, though they made it a point of honor to pay her in the smallest change they could muster. One fun-maker turned in three post-cards and a two-cent stamp; while another convulsed the company on the curb, now five deep and swelling rapidly, by volunteering to give his necktie in lieu of a quarter. It was no small relief to Grace when at last they rode out of the depot amid the cheers of the multitude, and took their swift way down Fairfield Avenue. But the three young rowdies, far from subsiding, egged one another on to fresh enormities. They would whoop at every passing

automobile, shout audible remarks about the personal appearance of its occupants, tell an old gentleman, cautiously picking his way across the street, to skin out or they'd take his leg off! It was a wild and mortifying progress, and as the streets gradually gave way to country roads, and Grace anticipated that the worst was over, the three young men discovered a new means of making themselves objectionable. They insisted on stopping at every roadhouse, tooting loudly for the bartender to come out and serve them, and tossing off, in the course of a dozen miles, an uncountable number of glasses of beer.

Had it not been for the presence of the farmer, seated placidly in the tonneau of the car with the rooster on his lap, Grace would have been terrified at her predicament. But his large, friendly bulk, his heavy shoulders, his big hands and honest face were immensely comforting to her. He resisted all the importunities of the others to drink with them, refusing with the greatest good-nature, and maintaining throughout a certain aloofness

and detachment. They called him Judge Hayseed, and guyed him mercilessly; but his deep, hearty laugh never showed the least sign of resentment, even when imaginary misadventures, of the blow-out-the-gas order, were fathered on him.

In the midst of an unceasing and vociferous hilarity, as they were bowling along at twelve miles an hour, which Grace would have made twenty if the engine hadn't worked so queerly, she felt the sharp dig of a finger against her back, and one of the young men cried out: "Say, young chafer, you've plunked a tire!"

She stopped the car and got out, and there, sure enough, one of the rear tires presented itself to her view in a state of melancholy collapse. It had picked up a horseshoe together with the three jagged nails adhering to it, and was patently, hopelessly, irretrievably punctured. Grace had seen a hundred repairs made on the road, but up to now she had never put her hands to the task herself. She brimmed over with the most cor-

rect theory, but had invariably relegated the practice to a skilful young man. As she dejectedly scanned the faces of her passengers, and met nothing in return but blank and dispirited stares, she manfully got out her little jack and started in on her own account. But she had hardly raised the wheel free from the ground, and was in the act of unscrewing the valve, when the wrench was suddenly taken out of her hand by Judge Hayseed, who asked in a very businesslike manner if there was an inner tube in the kit.

"I took notice of a feller doing this on my farm once," he drawled, "and it's kind of stuck in my head ever since." It had certainly stuck remarkably well, for the farmer attacked the shoe with the precision of a veteran. Loosening the lugs, and using the two strippers against each other with adroitness and strength, he quickly reached the point where he could easily draw out the inner tube.

When the tire was pumped up, and Grace was again about to take her place at the

steering-wheel, the farmer sprang a fresh surprise.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "What's been making you miss so horribly on the off cylinder?"

"Oh, the whole engine has been acting like the dickens," she returned distressfully. "It hasn't been developing half its power. It's in one of its mean humors to-day, and behaving like a pig."

"Couldn't you take off that front thing and let's see what's the trouble?" said the countryman, jumping back into his drawl.

And then, wrench in hand, he made a prolonged examination of the machinery. Then he turned over the engine and listened; then he turned over the engine again and listened some more. Then he crawled in under the wagon, reappearing with a lick of grease over one eye.

"It gets me," he said. "I ran a little oil out of the crank-case on general principles, and chased up the magnets — but everything's tip-top as far as I can see!"

"Suppose you crank up and let's try again," said the girl.

But the car went worse than ever. Instead of missing occasionally the engine began to run now in gasps. Just when Grace waited for it to die altogether it would give another cough and take another spurt ahead, progressing the car in a series of agonizing little rushes, every one promising to be the last. To add to Grace's discomfiture there was a fairly steep hill looming in front of them, and she foresaw their being stalled at the bottom. They made another stop. A pair of new spark-plugs was put in, but, instead of improving, the gasping got gaspier than ever. Still another stop, to replace the high tension wires.

But no improvement was effected. A weird, whizzling sound added itself to the other noises. Every gasp brought them nearer the hill, where, at the foot, the engine gave one awful hiccough and died dead.

"We might manage to crawl home the way we came," said Grace, at her wits' end.

"No, there's only one thing to do," said the farmer decisively, "and that's to start all over again and ferret out the trouble."

He got out again. So did Grace. So did the three touts. So did the rooster. It was a depressing moment.

Grace took off her long coat, laid it on one side of the road, and deposited her cap, mask and gauntlets. It would take time to put the car to rights, and she didn't wish to be hampered. Her dark, glowing, girlish face came as a revelation to the three sports. She had been hidden behind so much glass and leather that the transformation was startling. The horsy gentlemen uttered murmurs of surprise and gratification. One of them sidled up to her with a leer.

"We've had a bum ride in your bum wagon," he said, "and now you've stuck us down here nine miles from the nearest beer! You've a lot to answer for, you have."

"I shall certainly return your money," returned Grace coldly. "I can't do more than that, can I?"

"Oh, yes, you can, you wicked little chafer," he said, giving a wink over his shoulder to his companions. "What's the matter with a kiss?" And with that he passed his arm around her waist.

What happened next happened quicker than it takes to write it. The farmer's right hand descended on the young man's collar, and his left executed a succession of slaps on the young man's countenance, which, for vigor and swiftness, could not have been done better by machinery. Then he trailed him to one side of the road, still shaking him in an iron grasp, and kicked him into the ditch.

"Help!" roared the young man repeatedly in the course of these proceedings. "Help!"

This brought to the rescue his two friends, who, for the last instant, had been too spellbound to move. The farmer squared his fists and received the new-comers on his knuckles. He was a clean hitter, and from the way he pirouetted and skipped you would have said he could dance, too. The three young sports,

considerably the worse for wear, fled pell-mell for the barbed-wire fence that bordered the road, and went over it in the twinkling of an eye. Only a few bits of what they would probably have called " nobby pants," speckled here and there on the barbs, betrayed to later wayfarers this new instance of man's inhumanity to man.

" Do you know, we have never looked at the contact-box," said the farmer, returning to the car quite calmly to take up the interrupted thread of his conversation.

The tears were streaming down Grace's face, and her voice was scarcely controllable.

" It's a b-brush s-s-system," she said, " and it has always worked b-b-beautifully, and I never could have f-f-forgiven myself if they had h-h-hurt you!"

The farmer did not hear more than half the sentence. He was on his knees peering down into the works. Suddenly he raised his head with an expression of triumph.

Bing! A stone struck one of the kerosene lamps with a vicious crash.

Bing! Another just missed the countryman's rumpled hair.

Bing! A mud-guard shook with a loud and tinny reverberation.

The enemy, lined up in the neighboring field, and yelling shrilly, were opening up a rear-guard action with artillery.

"The contact-box is upside down," cried the farmer. "I can't see how it ever worked at all. Yank me out a screw-driver quick!"

The contact-box was on the exposed side. The farmer tried to hunch himself into the least compass possible, but his broad back and powerful frame interfered with his efforts to make a human hedgehog of himself. He was hit twice, once by a grazing shot that brought out blood on his cheek, the other a stinger on the hand.

"Scratch up a few rocks," he called to Grace, doggedly continuing his work, and keeping a careful eye on the screws he was taking out.

She got a dozen or so, and passed them over to him in a piece of chamois leather taken

from the tool kit. He caught it up and ran for the fence, the enemy retiring precipitately out of range. But if he made no bull's-eyes he had a pleasant sense, for a moment or two, of dominating the situation. Then he returned hurriedly to the car.

"I wonder if you and I couldn't push her around," he said to Grace. "They'll be back again in a minute, and then it will be altogether too sunny on this side." The pair of them laid on to the spokes of the driving-wheels, and with a yeo-heave-yeo managed to head the Despardoux in the direction of its native Stackport. Then the farmer settled to work again, Grace scurried about searching for ammunition, and the three young touts rained shower on shower of stones. If ever delicate adjustments were made under difficulties, it was on that Despardoux on that fateful occasion. The only alleviation of an otherwise intolerable situation was the magnificent behavior of the contact-box, which now, right side up and readjusted, showed every symptom of meaning to do its duty.

It was anxiously put to the test, and, on the engine being started, the farmer and Grace were rewarded by the chippetty, chippetty, chippetty, chippetty of perfect sparking and combustion.

The farmer rolled back the enemy, recovered Grace's coat and his own rooster, seated himself at the wheel, gave the girl a hand in, threw in his clutches and speeded up.

"Slow down!" cried Grace. "Slow down, please. I want to leave their horrid money on the road."

"Not on your life," said the farmer. "That three dollars belongs to the St. John's Home for Incurable Children!"

"*You* oughtn't to know anything about the St. John's Home," said Grace.

"Oh, I forgot — I don't," he retorted brazenly. "Only that three dollars is going to stay on board this car. If anybody ever earned three dollars by the sweat of their brow I guess it was you and me!"

Grace put her hands up to his head and deliberately drew off his hat, drew off his red

wig, drew off his red whiskers, and tossed them all back into the tonneau.

"Are you sorry I came?" said Coal Oil Johnny.

"There are some emotions that can not be put into words," she answered. "I won't try to say anything. I can't. But if I should ever seem unkind, or distant, or forgetful, or anything but the joy of your whole future existence — just you say contact-box, and I'll melt!"

JONES

I

I could have taken "No" like a man, and would have gone away decently and never bothered her again. I told her so straight out in the first angry flush of my rejection — but this string business, with everything left hanging in the air, so to speak, made a fellow feel like thirty cents.

"It simply means that I'm engaged and you are not," I said.

"It's nothing of the kind," she returned tearfully. "You're as free as free, Ezra. You can go away this moment, and never write, or anything!"

Her lips trembled as she said this, and I confess it gave me a kind of savage pleasure to feel that it was still in my power to hurt her.

It may sound unkind, but still you must admit that the whole situation was exasperating. Here was five-foot-five of exquisite, blooming, twenty-year-old American girlhood sending away the man she confessed to care for, because, forsooth, she would not marry before her elder sister! I always thought it was beautiful of Freddy (she was named Frederica, you know) to be always so sweet and tender and grateful about Eleanor; but sometimes gratitude can be carried altogether too far, even if you *are* an orphan, and *were* brought up by hand. Eleanor was thirty-four if a day — a nice enough woman, of course, and college bred, and cultivated, and clever — but her long suit wasn't good looks. She was tall and bony; worshiped genius and all that; and played the violin.

"No," repeated Freddy, "I shall never, never marry before Eleanor. It would mortify her — I know it would — and make her feel that she herself had failed. She's awfully frank about those things, Ezra — surprisingly frank. I don't see why being an old

maid is always supposed to be so funny, do you? It's touching and tragic in a woman who'd like to marry and who isn't asked!"

"But Eleanor must have had heaps of offers," I said, "surely —"

"Just one."

"Well, one's something," I remarked cheerfully. "Why didn't she take him then?"

"She told me only last night that she was sorry she hadn't!"

Here, at any rate, was something to chew on. I saw a gleam of hope. Why shouldn't Eleanor marry the only one — and make us all happy!

"That was three years ago," said Freddy.

"I have loved you for four," I retorted. I was cross with disappointment. To be dashed to the ground, you know, just as I was beginning — "Tell me some more about him," I went on. I'm a plain business man and hang on to an idea like a bulldog; once I get my teeth in they stay in, for all you may drag at me and wallop me with an umbrella — metaphorically speaking, of course.

"Tell me his name, where he lives, and all."

"We were coming back from Colorado, and there was some mistake about our tickets. They sold our Pullman drawing-room twice over — to Doctor Jones and his mother, and also to ourselves. You never saw such a fight — and that led to our making friends, and his proposing to Eleanor!"

"Then why in Heaven's name didn't she" (it was on the tip of my tongue to say "jump at him") "take him?"

"She said she couldn't marry a man who was her intellectual inferior."

"And was he?"

"Oh, he was a perfect idiot — but nice, and all that, and tremendously in love with her. Pity, wasn't it?"

"The obvious thing to do is to chase him up instantly. Where did you say he lived?"

"His mother told me he was going to New York to practise medicine."

"But didn't you ever hear from him again? I mean, was that the end of it all?"

"Yes."

"Then you don't even know if he has married since?"

"No!"

"Nor died?"

"No."

"Nor anything at all?"

"No."

"What was his first name?"

"Wait a moment . . . let me think . . . yes, it was Harry."

"Just Harry Jones, then, New York City?"

Freddy laughed forlornly.

"But he must have had antecedents," I cried out. "There are two ways of doing this Sherlock Holmes business — backward and forward, you know. Let's take Doctor Jones backward. As they say in post-office forms — what was his place of origin?"

"New York City."

"He begins there and ends there, does he, then?"

"Yes."

"But how sure are you that Eleanor would

marry him if I did manage to find him and bring him back?"

"I'm not sure at all."

"No, but Freddy, listen — it's important. You told me yourself that she — I want the very identical words she used."

Freddy reflected.

"She said she was almost sorry she hadn't accepted that silly doctor!"

"That doesn't seem much, does it?" I remarked gloomily.

"Oh, from Eleanor it does, Ezra. She said it quite seriously. She always hides her feelings under a veil of sarcastic humor, you know."

"You're certainly a very difficult family to marry," I said.

"Being an orphan —" she began.

"Well, I'm going to find that Jones if I —!"

"Ezra, dear boy, you're crazy. How could you think for a moment that —"

"I'm off, little girl. Good-by!"

"Wait a second, Ezra!"

She rose and went into the next room, reappearing with something in her hand. She was crying and smiling both at once. I took the little case she gave me — it was like one of those things that pen-knives are put in — and looked at her for an explanation.

"It's the h-h-hindleg of a j-j-jack-rabbit," she said, "shot by a g-g-grave at the f-f-full of the moon. It's supposed to be l-l-lucky. It was given to me by a naval officer who got drowned. It's the only way I can h-h-help you!"

And thus equipped I started bravely for New York.

II

In the directory I found eleven pages of Joneses; three hundred and eighty-four Henry Joneses; and (excluding seventeen dentists) eighty-seven Doctor Henry Joneses. I asked one of the typists in the office to copy out the list, and prepared to wade in. We were on the eve of a labor war, and it was

exceedingly difficult for me to get away. As the managing partner of Hodge & Westoby, boxers (not punching boxers, nor China boxers, but just plain American box-making boxers), I had to bear the brunt of the whole affair, and had about as much spare time as you could heap on a ten-cent piece. I had to be firm, conciliatory, defiant and tactful all at once, and every hour I took off for Jonesing threatened to blow the business sky-high. It was a tight place and no mistake, and it was simply jack-rabbit hindleg luck that pulled me through!

My first Jones was a hoary old rascal above a drug store. He was a hard man to get away from, and made such a fuss about my wasting his time with idle questions that I flung him a dollar and departed. He followed me down to my cab and insisted on sticking in a giant bottle of his Dog-Root Tonic. I dropped it overboard a few blocks farther on, and thought that was the end of it till the whole street began to yell at me, and a policeman grabbed my horse, while a street

arab darted up breathless with the Dog-Root Tonic. I presented it to him, together with a quarter, the policeman darkly regarding me as an incipient madman.

The second Jones was a man of about thirty, a nice, gentlemanly fellow, in a fine office. I have usually been an off-hand man in business, accustomed to quick decisions and very little beating about the bush. But I confess I was rather nonplussed with the second Jones. How the devil was I to *begin?* His waiting-room was full of people, and I hardly felt entitled to sit down and gas about one thing and the other till the chance offered of leading up to the Van Coorts. So I said I had some queer, shooting sensations in the chest. In five minutes he had me half-stripped and was pounding my midriff in. And the questions that man asked! He began with my grandparents, roamed through my childhood and youth, dissected my early manhood, and finally came down to coffee and what I ate for breakfast.

Then it was my turn.

I asked him, as a starter, whether he had ever been in Colorado?

No, he hadn't.

After forty-five minutes of being hammered, and stethoscoped, and punched, and holding my breath till I was purple, and hopping on one leg, he said I was a very obscure case of something with nine syllables!

"At least, I won't be positive with one examination," he said; "but kindly come tomorrow at nine, when I shall be more at leisure to go into the matter thoroughly."

I paid him ten dollars and went sorrowfully away.

The third Jones was too old to be my man; so was the fourth; the fifth had gone away the month before, leaving no address; the sixth, however, was younger and more promising. I thought this time I'd choose something easier than pains in the chest. I changed them to my left hand. I was going to keep my clothes on, anyhow. But it wasn't any use. Off they came. After a decent interval of thumping and grandfath-

ers, and what I had for breakfast, I managed to get in my question:

"Ever in Colorado, Doctor?"

"Oh, dear me, no!"

Another ten dollars, and nothing accomplished!

The seventh Jones was again too old; the eighth was a pale hobbledehoy; the ninth was a loathsome quack; the tenth had died that morning; the eleventh was busy; the twelfth was a veterinary surgeon; the thirteenth was an intern living at home with his widowed sister. Colorado? No, the widowed sister was positive he had never been there. The fourteenth was a handsome fellow of about thirty-five. He looked poor and threadbare, and I had a glimpse of a shabby bed behind a screen. Patients obviously did not often come his way, and his joy at seeing me was pitiful. I had meant to try a bluff and get in my Colorado question this time free of charge; but I hadn't the heart to do it. Slight pains in the head seemed a safe complaint.

After a few questions he said he would have to make a thorough physical examination.

"No clothes off!" I protested.

"It's essential," he said, and went on with something about the radio-activity of the brain, and the vasomotor centers. The word motor made me feel like a sick automobile. I begged to keep my clothes on; I insisted; I promised to come to-morrow; but it wasn't any good, and in a few minutes he was hitting me harder than either of the two before. Maybe I was more tender! He electrocuted me extra from a switchboard, ran red-hot needles into my legs, and finally, after banging me around the room, said I was the strongest and wellest man who had ever entered his office.

"There's a lot of make-believe in medicine," he said; "but I'm one of those poor devils who can't help telling a patient the truth. There's nothing whatever the matter with you, Mr. Westoby, except that your skin has a slightly abrased look, and I seem to notice an abnormal sensitiveness to touch."

"Were you ever in Colorado, Doctor?" I asked while he was good enough to help me into my shirt.

"Oh, yes, I know Colorado well!"

My heart beat high.

"Some friends of mine were out there three years ago," I said. "Wouldn't it be strange if by any chance the Van Coorts —"

"Oh, I left Denver when I was fifteen."

Five dollars!

The fifteenth Jones was a doctor of divinity; the sixteenth was a tapeworm specialist; the seventeenth was too old, the eighteenth was too old, the nineteenth was too old — a trio of disappointing patriarchs. The twentieth painted out black eyes; the twenty-first was a Russian who could scarcely speak any English. He said he had changed his name from Karaforvochristophervitch to something more suited to American pronunciation. He seemed to think that Jones gave him a better chance. I sincerely hope it did. He told me that all the rest of the Jones family was in Siberia, but that he was going to bomb

them out! The twenty-second was a negro. The twenty-third — ! He was a tall, youngish man, narrow-shouldered, rather commonplace-looking, with beautiful blue eyes, and a timid, winning, deprecatory manner. I told him I was suffering from insomnia. After raking over my grandfathers again and bringing the family history down by stages to the very moment I was shown into his office he said he should have to ask me to undergo a thorough physical — ! But I was tired of being slapped and punched and breathed on and prodded, and was bold enough to refuse point-blank. I'd rather have the insomnia! We worked up quite a fuss about it, for there was something tenacious in the fellow, for all his mild, kind, gentle ways; and I had all I could do to get off by pleading press of business. But I wasn't to escape scot-free. Medical science had to get even somehow. He compromised by stinging my eye out with belladonna. Have *you* ever had belladonna squirted in *your* eye? Well, don't!

He was sitting at the table, writing out some cabalistic wiggles that stood for bromide of potassium, when I remarked casually that it was strange how well I could always sleep in Colorado.

He laid down the pen with a sigh.

"A wonderful state — Colorado," I observed.

"To me it's the land of memories," he said. "Sad, beautiful, irrevocable memories — try tea for breakfast — do you read Browning? Then you will remember that line: 'Oh, if I —' And I insist on your giving up that cocktail before dinner."

"Some very dear friends of mine were once in Colorado," I said. "Morristown people — the Van Coorts."

"The Van Coorts!"

Doctor Jones sprang from his chair, his thin, handsome face flushing with excitement.

"Do you mean to say that you know Eleanor Van Coort?" he gasped.

"All my life."

He dropped back into the chair again and

mumbled something about cigars. I was only to have blank a day. In his perturbation I believe he limited me to a daily box. He was trying — and trying very badly — to conceal the emotions I had conjured up.

"They were talking about you only yesterday," I went on. "That is, if it *was* you! A Pullman drawing-room — "

"And a mistake about the tickets," he broke out. "Yes, yes, it's they all right. Talking about me, did you say? Did Eleanor — I mean, did Miss Van Coort — express —? "

"She was wondering how she could find you," I said. "You see, they're busy getting up a house-party and she was running over her men. 'If I only knew where that dear Doctor Jones was,' she said, and then asked me, if by any possible chance — "

His fine blue eyes were glistening with all sorts of tender thoughts. It was really touching. And I was in love myself, you know.

"So she has remained unmarried! " he ex-

claimed softly. "Unmarried — after all these years!"

"She's a very popular girl," I said. "She's had dozens of men at her feet — but an unfortunate attachment, something that seems to go back to about three years ago, has apparently determined her to stay out of the game!"

Doctor Jones dropped his head on his hands and murmured something that sounded like "Eleanor, Eleanor!" Then he looked up with one of the most radiant smiles I ever saw on a man's face. "I hope I'm not presuming on a very short acquaintance," he said, "but the fact is — why should I not tell you? — Miss Van Coort was the woman in my life!"

I explained to him that Freddy was the woman in mine.

Then you ought to have seen us fraternize!

In twenty minutes I had him almost convinced that Eleanor had loved him all these years. But he worried a lot about a Mr. Wise who had been on the same train, and a

certain Colonel Hadow who had also paid Eleanor attention. Jones was a great fellow for wanting to be sure. I pooh-poohed them out of the way and gave him the open track. Then, indeed, the clouds rolled away. He beamed with joy. In his rich gush of friendship he recurred to the subject of my insomnia with a new-born enthusiasm. He subdivided all my symptoms. He dived again into my physical being. He consulted German authorities. I squirmed and lied and resisted all I could, but he said he owed me an eternal debt that could only be liquidated by an absolute cure. He wanted to tie me up and shoot me with an X-ray. He ordered me to wear white socks. He had a long, terrifying look at a drop of my blood. He jerked hairs out of my head to sample my nerve force. He said I was a baffling subject, but that he meant to make me well if it took the last shot in the scientific locker. And he wound up at last by refusing point-blank to be paid a cent!

I waltzed away on air to write an account

of the whole affair to Freddy, and dictate a plan of operations. I was justified in feeling proud of myself. Most men would have tamely submitted to their fate instead of chasing up all the Joneses of Jonesville! Freddy sent me an early answer — a gay, happy, overflowing little note — telling me to try and engage Doctor Jones for a three-day house-party at Morristown. I was to telegraph when he could come, and was promised an official invitation from Mrs. Matthewman. (She was the aunt, you know, that they lived with — one of those old porcelain ladies with a lace cap and a rent-roll.) However, I could not do anything for two days, for we had reached a crisis in the labor troubles, and matters were approaching the breaking point. We were threatened with one of those "sympathetic" strikes that drive business men crazy. There was no question at issue between ourselves and our employees; but the thing ramified off somewhere to the sugar vacuum-boiler riveters' union. Finally the S. V. B. R. U. came to a settlement with their

bosses, and peace was permitted to descend on Hodge & Westoby's.

I took immediate advantage of it to descend myself on Doctor Jones. He received me with open arms and an insomniacal outburst. He had been reading up; he had been seeing distinguished confrères; he had been mastering the subject to the last dot, and was panting to begin. I hated to dampen such friendship and ardor by telling him that I had completely recovered. Under the circumstances it seemed brutal — but I did it. The poor fellow tried to argue with me, but I insisted that I now slept like a top. It sounded horribly ungrateful. Here I was spurning the treasures of his mind, and almost insulting him with my disgusting good health. I swerved off to the house-party; Eleanor's delight, and so on; Mrs. Matthewman's pending invitation; the hope that he might have an early date free —

He listened to it all in silence, walking restlessly about the office, his blue eyes shining with a strange light. He took up a bronze

paper-weight and gazed at it with an intensity of self-absorption.

"I can't go," he said.

"Oh, but you have to," I exclaimed.

"Mr. Westoby," he resumed, "I was foolish enough to back a friend's credit at a store here. He has skipped to Minnesota, and I am left with three hundred and four dollars and seventy-five cents to pay. To take a three days' holiday would be a serious matter to me at any time, but at this moment it is impossible."

I gave him a good long look. He didn't strike me as a borrowing kind of man. I should probably insult him by volunteering. Was there ever anything so unfortunate?

"I can't go," he repeated with a little choke.

"You may never have another opportunity," I said. "Eleanor is doing a thing I should never have expected from one of her proud and reserved nature. The advances of such a woman — "

He interrupted me with a groan.

"If it wasn't for my mother I'd throw everything to the winds and fly to her," he burst out. "But I have a mother — a sainted mother, Mr. Westoby — her welfare must always be my first consideration!"

"Is there no chance of anything turning up?" I said. "An appendicitis case — an outbreak of measles? I thought there was a lot of scarlatina just now."

He shook his head dejectedly.

"Doctor," I began again, "I am pretty well fixed myself. I'm blessed with an income that runs to five figures. If all goes the way it should we shall be brothers-in-law in six months. We are almost relations. Give me the privilege of taking over this small obligation — "

I never saw a man so overcome. My proposal seemed to tear the poor devil to pieces. When he spoke his voice was trembling.

"You don't know what it means to me to refuse," he said. "My self-respect . . . my — my . . ." And then he positively began to weep!

"You said three hundred and four dollars and seventy-five cents, I believe?"

He waved it from him with a long, lean hand.

"I can not do it," he said; "and, for God's sake, don't ask me to!"

I argued with him for twenty minutes; I laid the question before him in a million lights; I racked him with a picture of Eleanor, so deeply hurt, so mortified, that in her recklessness and despair she would probably throw herself away on the first man that offered! This was his chance, I told him; the one chance of his life; he was letting a piece of idiotic pride wreck the probable happiness of years. He agreed with me with moans and weeps. He had the candor of a child and the torrential sentiment of a German musician. Three hundred and four dollars and seventy-five cents stood between him and eternal bliss, and yet he waved my pocketbook from him! And all the while I saw myself losing Freddy.

I went away with his "No, no, no!" still ringing in my ears.

At the club I found a note from Freddy. She pressed me to lose no time. Mrs. Matthewman was talking of going to Europe, and of course she and Eleanor would have to accompany her. Eleanor, she said, had ordered two new gowns and had brightened up wonderfully. "Only yesterday she told me she wished that silly doctor would hurry up and come — and that, you know, from Eleanor is almost a declaration!"

Some of my best friends happened to be in the club. It occurred to me that poor Nevill was diabetic, and that Charley Crossman had been boring everybody about his gout. I buttonholed them both, and laid my unfortunate predicament before them. I said I'd pay all the expenses. In fact, the more they could make it cost the better I'd be pleased.

"What," roared Nevill, "put myself in the hands of a young fool so that he may fill his empty pockets with your money! Where do *I* come in? Good heavens, Westoby, you're crazy! Think what would happen to me if it came to Doctor Saltworthy's ears?

He'd never have anything more to do with me!"

Charley Crossman was equally rebellious and unreasonable.

"I guess you've never had the gout," he said grimly.

"But Charley, old man," I pleaded, "all that you'd have to do would be to let him *talk* to you. I don't ask you to suffer for it. Just pay — that's all — pay my money!"

"I'm awfully easily talked into things," said Charley. (There was never such a mule on the Produce Exchange.) "He'd be saying, 'Take this' — and I'm the kind of blankety-blank fool that would take it!"

Then I did a mean thing. I reminded Crossman of having backed some bills of his — big bills, too — at a time when it was touch and go whether he'd manage to keep his head above water.

"Westoby," he replied, "don't think that time has lessened my sense of that obligation. I'd cut off my right hand to do you a

good turn. But for heaven's sake, don't ask me to monkey with my gout!"

The best I could get out of him was the promise of an anemic servant-girl. Nevill generously threw in a groom with varicose veins. Small contributions, but thankfully received.

"Now, what you do," said Nevill, "is to go round right off and interview Bishop Jordan. He has sick people to burn!"

But I said Jones would get on to it if I deluged him with the misery of the slums.

"That's just where the bishop comes in," said Nevill. "There isn't a man more in touch with the saddest kind of poverty in New York — the decent, clean, shrinking poverty that hides away from all the dead-head coffee and doughnuts. If I was in your fix I'd fall over myself to reach Jordan!"

"Yes, you try Jordan," said Charley, who, I'm sure, had never heard of him before.

"Then it's me for Jordan," said I.

I went down stairs and told one of the bell-boys to look up the address in the tele-

phone-book. It seemed to me he looked pale, that boy.

"Aren't you well, Dan?" I said.

"I don't know what's the matter with me, sir. I guess it must be the night work."

I gave him a five-dollar bill and made him write down 1892 Eighth Avenue on a piece of paper.

"You go and see Doctor Jones first thing," I said. "And don't mention my name, nor spend the money on *Her Mad Marriage*."

I jumped into a hansom with a pleasant sense that I was beginning to make the fur fly.

"That's a horrible cold of yours, Cabby," I said as we stopped at the bishop's door and I handed him up a dollar bill. "That's just the kind of a cold that makes graveyards hum!"

"I can't shake it off, sir," he said despondently. "Try what I can, and it's never no use!"

"There's one doctor in the world who can cure anything," I said; "Doctor Henry

Jones, 1892 Eighth Avenue. I was worse than you two weeks ago, and now look at me! Take this five dollars, and for heaven's sake, man, put yourself in his hands quick."

Bishop Jordan was a fine type of modern clergyman. He was broad-shouldered mentally as well as physically, and he brought to philanthropic work the thoroughness, care, enthusiasm and capacity that would have earned him a fortune in business.

"Bishop," I said, "I've come to see if I can't make a trade with you!"

He raised his grizzled eyebrows and gave me a very searching look.

"A trade," he repeated in a holding-back kind of tone, as though wondering what the trap was.

"Here's a check for one thousand dollars drawn to your order," I went on. "And here's the address of Doctor Henry Jones, 1892 Eighth Avenue. I want this money to reach him via your sick people, and that without my name being known or at all suspected."

"May I not ask the meaning of so peculiar a request?"

"He's hard up," I said, "and I want to help him. It occurred to me that I might make you — er — a confederate in my little game, you know."

His eyes twinkled as he slowly folded up my check and put it in his pocket.

"I don't want any economy about it, Bishop," I went on. "I don't want you to make the best use of it, or anything of that kind. I want to slap it into Doctor Jones' till, and slap it in quick."

"Would you consider two weeks —?"

"Oh, one, please!"

"It is understood, of course, that this young man is a duly qualified and capable physician, and that in the event of my finding it otherwise I shall be at liberty to direct your check to other uses?"

"Oh, I can answer for his being all right, Bishop. He's thoroughly up-to-date, you know; does the X-ray act; and keeps the pace of modern science."

"You say you can answer for him," said the bishop genially. "Might I inquire who *you* are?"

"I'm named Westoby — Ezra Westoby — managing partner of Hodge & Westoby, boxers."

"I like boxers," said the bishop in the tone of a benediction, rising to dismiss me. "I like one thousand dollar checks, too. When you have any more to spare just give them a fair wind in this direction!"

I went out feeling that the Episcopal Church had risen fifty per cent. in my esteem. Bishops like that would make a success of any denomination. I like to see a fellow who's on to his job.

I gave Jones a week to grapple with the new developments, and then happened along. The anteroom was full, and there was a queue down the street like a line of music-loving citizens waiting to hear Patti. Nice, decent-looking people, with money in their hands. (I always like to see a cash business, don't you?) I guess it took me an hour to

crowd my way up stairs, and even then I had to buy a man out of the line.

Jones was carrying off the boom more quietly than I cared about. He wore a curt, snappy air. I don't know why, but I felt misgivings as I shook hands with him.

Of course I commented on the rush.

"The Lord only knows what's happened to my practice," he said. "The blamed thing has gone up like a rocket. It seems to me there must be a great wave of sickness passing over New York just now."

"Everybody's complaining," I said.

This reminded him of my insomnia till I cut him short.

"What's the matter with our going down to the Van Coorts' from Saturday to Tuesday," I said. "They haven't given up the hope of seeing you there, Doctor, and the thing's still open."

Then I waited for him to jump with joy.

He didn't jump a bit. He shook his head. He distinctly said "No."

"I told you it was the money side of it

that bothered me," he explained. "So it was at the time, for, of course, I couldn't foresee that my practice was going to fill the street and call for policemen to keep order. But, my dear Westoby, after giving the subject a great deal of consideration I have come to the conclusion that it would be too painful for me to revive those — those — unhappy emotions I was just beginning to recover from!"

"I thought you loved her!" I exclaimed.

"That's why I've determined not to go," he said. "I have outlived one refusal. How do I know I have the strength, the determination, the hardihood to undergo the agonies of another?"

It seemed a feeble remark to say that faint heart never won fair lady. I growled it out more like a swear than anything else. I was disgusted with the chump.

"She's the star above me," he said; "and I am crushed by my own presumption. Is there any such fool as the man that breaks his heart twice for the impossible?"

"But it isn't impossible," I cried.

"Hasn't she — as far as a woman can — hasn't she called you back to her? What more do you expect her to do? A woman's delicacy forbids her screaming for a man! I think Eleanor has already gone a tremendous way in just hinting — "

"You may be right," he said pathetically; "but then you may also be wrong. The risk is too terrible for me to run. It will comfort me all my life to think that perhaps she does love me in secret!"

"Do you mean to say you're going to give it all up?" I roared.

"You needn't get so warm about it," he returned. "After all, I have some justification in thinking she doesn't care."

"What on earth do you suppose she invited you for, then?"

"Well, it would be different," he said, "if I had a note from her — a flower — some little tender reminder of those dear old dead days in the Pullman!"

"She's saving up all that for Morristown," I said.

For the first time in our acquaintance Doctor Jones looked at me with suspicion. His blue eyes clouded. He was growing a little restive under my handling.

"You seem to make the matter a very personal one," he observed.

"Well, I love Freddy," I explained. "It naturally brings your own case very close to me. And then I am so positive that you love Eleanor and that Eleanor loves you. Put yourself in my place, Doctor! Do you mean that you'd do nothing to bring two such noble hearts together?"

He seized my hand and wrung it effusively. He really *did* love Eleanor, you know. The only fault with him was his being so darned humble about it. He was eaten up with a sense of his own inferiority. And yet I could see he was just tingling to go to Morristown. Of course, I crowded him all I could, but the best I could accomplish was his promise to "think it over." I hated to leave him wabbling, but patients were scuffling at the door and fighting on the stairs.

The next thing I did was to get Freddy on the long-distance 'phone.

"Freddy," I said, after explaining the situation, "you must get Eleanor to telegraph to him direct!"

"What's the good of asking what she won't do?" bubbled the sweet little voice.

"Can't you persuade her?"

"I know she won't do it!"

"Then you must forge it," I said desperately. "It needn't be anything red-hot, you know. But something tender and sincere: 'Shall be awfully disappointed if you don't come,' or, 'There was a time when you would not have failed me!'"

"It's impossible."

"Then he won't budge a single inch!" I replied.

"Ezra?"

"Darling!"

"Suppose I just signed the telegram Van Coort?"

"The very thing!"

"If he misunderstood it — I mean if he

thought it really came from Eleanor — there couldn't be any fuss about it afterward, could there?"

"And, of course, you'll send the official invitation from Mrs. Matthewman besides?"

"For Saturday?"

"Yes, Saturday!"

"And *you'll* come?"

"Just watch me!"

"Ezra, are you happy?"

"That depends on Jones."

"Oh, isn't it exciting?"

"I have the ring in my pocket —"

"But touch wood, won't you?"

"Freddy?"

"Yes —"

"What's the matter with getting some forget-me-nots and mailing them to Jones in an envelope?"

"All right, I'll attend to it. Eighteen ninety-two Eighth Avenue, isn't it?"

"Be sure it *is* forget-me-nots, you know. Don't mix up the language of flowers, and send him one that says: 'I'm off with a

handsomer man,' or, 'You needn't come round any more!'"

"Oh, Ezra, Eleanor is really getting quite worked up!"

"So am I!"

"Wouldn't it be perfectly splendid if — Switch off quick, here's aunt coming!"

"Mayn't I even say I love you?"

"I daren't say it back, Ezra — she's calling."

"But *do* you?"

"Yes, unfortunately —"

"Why unfortun —?"

Buzz-buzz-swizzleum-bux-bux!— Aunt had cut us off. However, short as my little talk with Freddy had been, it brightened my whole day.

Late the same afternoon, I went back to Doctor Jones. I was prepared to find him uplifted, but I hadn't counted on his being maudlin. The fellow was drunk, positively drunk — with happiness. His tongue ran on like a mill-stream. I had to sit down and have the whole Pullman-car episode inflicted

on me a second time. I was shown the receipt-slip. I was shown the telegram from Eleanor. I was shown with a whoop the forget-me-nots! Then he was going on Saturday? I asked. He said he guessed it would take an earthquake to keep him away, and a pretty big earthquake, too! . . . Oh, it was a great moment, and all the greater because I was tremendously worked up, too. I saw Freddy floating before me, my sweet, girlish, darling Freddy, holding out her arms . . . while Jones gassed and gassed and gassed. . . .

I left him taking phenacetin for his headache.

III

The house-party had grown a little larger than was originally intended. On Saturday night we sat down twelve to dinner. Doctor Jones and I shared a room together, and I must say whatever misgivings I might have had about him wore away very quickly on

closer acquaintance. In the first place he looked well in evening dress, carrying himself with a sort of shy, kind air that became him immensely. At table he developed the greatest of conversational gifts — that of the appreciative and intelligent listener. I heard one of the guests asking Eleanor who was that charming young man. Freddy and I hugged each other (I mean metaphorically, of course) and gloried in his success. In the presence of an admirer (such is the mystery of women) Eleanor instantly got fifteen points better looking, and you wouldn't have known her for the same girl. Freddy thought it was the two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar gown she wore, but I could see it was deeper than that. She was thawing in the sunshine of love, and I'll do Doctor Jones the justice to say that he didn't hide his affection under a bushel. It was generous enough for everybody to bask in, and in his pell-mell ardor he took us all to his bosom. The women loved him for it, and entered into a tacit conspiracy to gain him the right-of-way to wher-

ever Eleanor was to be found. In fact, he followed her about like a dog, and she could scarcely move without stepping on him.

Sunday was even better. One of the housemaids drank some wood alcohol by mistake for vichy water, and the resulting uproar redounded to Jones' coolness, skill and despatch. He dominated the situation and — well, I won't describe it, this not being a medical work, and the reader probably being a good guesser. Mrs. Matthewman remarked significantly that it must be nice to be the wife of a medical man — one would always have the safe feeling of a doctor at hand in case anything happened at night! Eleanor said it was a beautiful profession that had for its object the alleviation of human pain. Freddy jealously tried to get in a good word for boxers, but nobody would listen to her except me. It was all Jones, Jones, Jones, and the triumphs of modern medicine. Altogether he sailed through that whole day with flying colors, first with the housemaid, and then afterward at church, where he was the only

one that knew what Sunday after Epiphany it was. He made it plainer than ever that he was a model young man and a pattern. Mrs. Matthewman compared him to her departed husband, and talked about old-fashioned courtesy and the splendid men of her youth. Everybody fell over everybody else to praise him. It was a regular Jones boom. People began to write down his address, and ask him if he'd be free Thursday, or what about Friday, and started to book seats in advance.

That evening, as I was washing my hands before dinner and cheerfully whistling *Hiawatha,* I became conscious that Jones was lolling back on a sofa at the dark end of the room. What particularly arrested my attention was a groan — a hollow, reverberatory groan — preceded by a pack of heartrending sighs. It worried me — when everything seemed to be going so well. He had every right to be whistling *Hiawatha,* too.

"What's the matter, Jones?" said I.

He keeled over on the sofa, and groaned louder than ever.

"It isn't possible — that she's refused you?" I exclaimed. He muttered something about his mother.

"Well, what about your mother?" I said.

"Westoby," he returned, "I guess I was the worst kind of fool ever to put my foot into this house."

That was nice news, wasn't it? Just as I was settling in my head to buy that Seventy-second Street place, and alter the basement into a garage!

"You see, old man, my mother would never consent to my marrying Eleanor. I'm in the position of having to choose between her and the woman I love. And I owe so much to my mother, Westoby. She stinted herself for years to get me through college; she hardly had enough to eat; she . . ." Then he groaned a lot more.

"I can't think that your mother — a mother like yours, Jones — would consent to stand between you and your lifelong happiness. It's morbid — that's what I call it — morbid, just to dream of such a thing."

"There's Bertha," he quavered.

"Great Scott, and who's Bertha?"

"The girl my mother chose for me two years ago — Bertha McNutt, you know. She'd really prefer me not to marry at all, but if I must — it's Bertha, Westoby — Bertha or nothing!"

"It's too late to say that now, old fellow."

"It's not too late for me to go home this very night."

"Well, Jones," I broke out, "I can't think you'd do such a caddish thing as that. Think it over for a minute. You come down here; you sweep that unfortunate girl off her feet; you make love to her with the fury of a stage villain; you force her to betray her very evident partiality for you — and then you have the effrontery to say: 'Good-by. I'm off.'"

"My mother — " he began.

"You simply can not act so dishonorably, Jones."

He sat silent for a little while.

"My mother —" he started in again finally.

"Surely your mother loves you?" I demanded.

"That's the terrible part of it, Westoby, she —"

"Pooh!"

"She stinted herself to get me through col —"

"Then why did you ever come here?"

"That's just the question I'm asking myself now."

"I don't see that you have any right to assume all that about your mother, anyway. Eleanor Van Coort is a woman of a thousand — unimpeachable social position — a little fortune of her own — accomplished, handsome, charming, sought after — why, if you managed to win such a girl as that your mother would walk on air."

"No, she wouldn't. Bertha —"

"You're a pretty cheap lover," I said. "I don't set up to be a little tin hero, but I'd go through fire and water for *my* girl. Good heavens, love is love, and all the mothers —"

He let out a few more groans.

"Then, see here, Jones," I went on, "you owe some courtesy to our hostesses. If you went away to-night it would be an insult. Whatever you decide to do later, you've simply got to stay here till Tuesday morning!"

"Must I?" he said, in the tone of a person who is ordered not to leave the sinking ship.

"A gentleman has to," I said.

He quavered out a sort of acquiescence, and then asked me for the loan of a white tie. I should have loved to give him a bowstring instead, with somebody who knew how to operate it. He was a fluff, that fellow — a tarnation fluff!

IV

It was a pretty glum evening all round. Most of them thought that Jones had got the chilly mitt. Eleanor looked pale and undecided, not knowing what to make of Jones' death's-head face. She was resentful and pitying in turns, and I saw all the material lying around for a first-class conflagration.

Freddy was a bit down on me, too, saying that a smoother method would have ironed out Jones, and that I had been headlong and silly. She cried over it, and wouldn't kiss me in the dark; and I was goaded into saying — Well, the course of true love ran in bumps that night. There was only one redeeming circumstance, and that was my managing to keep Jones and Eleanor apart. I mean that I insisted on being number three till at last poor Eleanor said she had a headache, and forlornly went up to bed.

Jones was still asleep when I got up the next morning at six and dressed myself quietly so as not to awake him. It was now Monday, and you can see for yourself there was no time to spare. I gave the butler a dollar, and ordered him to say that unexpected business had called me away without warning, but that I should be back by luncheon. I rather overdid the earliness of it all. At least, I hove off 1892 Eighth Avenue at eight-fifteen A. M. I loitered about; looked at pawnshop windows; gave a careful examina-

tion to a forty-eight-dollars-ninety-eight-cent complete outfit for a four-room flat; had a chat with a policeman; assisted at a runaway; advanced a nickel to a colored gentleman in distress; had my shoes shined by another; helped a child catch an escaped parrot — and still it wasn't nine! Idleness is a grinding occupation, especially on Eighth Avenue in the morning.

Mrs. Jones was a thin, straight-backed, brisk old lady, with a keen tongue, and a Yankee faculty for coming to the point. I besought her indulgence, and laid the whole Eleanor matter before her — at least, as much of it as seemed wise. I appeared in the rôle of her son's warmest admirer and best friend.

"Surely you won't let Harry ruin his life from a mistaken sense of his duty to you?"

"Duty, fiddlesticks!" said she. "He's going to marry Bertha McNutt!"

"But he doesn't want to marry Bertha McNutt!"

"Then he needn't marry anybody."

She seemed to think this a triumphant an-

swer. Indeed, in some ways I must confess it was. But still I persevered.

"It puts me out to have him shilly-shallying around like this," she said. "I'll give him a good talking to when he gets back. This other arrangement has been understood between Mrs. McNutt and myself for years."

She was an irritating person. I found it not a little difficult to keep my temper with her. It's easier to fight dragons than to temporize with them and appeal to their better nature. I appealed and appealed. She watched me with the same air of interested detachment that one gives to a squirrel revolving in a cage. I could feel that she was flattered; her sense of power was agreeably tickled; my earnestness and despair enhanced the zest of her reiterated refusals. I was a very nice young man, but her son was going to marry Bertha McNutt or marry nobody!

Then I tried to draw a lurid picture of his revolt from her apron-strings.

"Oh, Harry's a good boy," she said. "You can't make me believe that two days

has altered his whole character. I'll answer for his doing what I want."

I felt a precisely similar conviction, and my heart sank into my shoes.

At this moment there was a tap at the door, and another old lady bounced in. She was stout, jolly-looking and effusive. The greetings between the pair were warm, and they were evidently old friends. But underneath the new-comer's gush and noise I was dimly conscious of a sort of gay hostility. She was exultant and frightened, both at once, and her eyes were sparkling.

"Well, what do you think?" she cried out, explosively.

Mrs. Jones' lips tightened. There was a mean streak in that old woman. I could see she was feeling for her little hatchet, and was getting out her little gun.

"Bertha!" exploded the old lady. "Bertha —"

(Mysterious mental processes at once informed me that this was none other than Bertha's mother.)

Mrs. Jones was coolly taking aim. I was reminded of that old military dictum: "Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes!"

"Bertha," vociferated the old lady fiercely — "Bertha has been secretly married to Mr. Stuffenhammer for the last three months!"

Another series of kinematographic mental processes informed me that Mr. Stuffenhammer was an immense catch.

"Twenty thousand dollars a year, and her own carriage," continued Mrs. McNutt gloatingly. "You could have knocked me down with a feather. Bertha is such a considerate child; she insisted on marrying secretly so that she could tone it down by degrees to poor Harry; though there was no engagement or anything like that, she could not help feeling of course that she owed it to the dear boy to gradually — "

Mrs. Jones never turned a hair or moved a muscle.

"You needn't pity Harry," she said. "I've just got the good news that he's en-

gaged to one of the sweetest and richest girls in Morristown."

I jumped for my hat and ran.

V

You never saw anybody so electrified as Jones. For a good minute he couldn't even speak. It was like bringing a horseback reprieve to the hero on the stage. He repeated "Stuffenhammer, Stuffenhammer," in tones that Henry Irving might have envied, while I gently undid the noose around his neck. I led him under a tree and told him to buck up. He did so — slowly and surely — and then began to ask me agitated questions about proposing. He deferred to me as though I had spent my whole life Bluebearding through the social system. He wanted to be coached how to do it, you know. I told him to rip out the words — any old words — and then kiss her.

"Don't let there be any embarrassing pause," I said. "A girl hates pauses."

"It seems a great liberty," he returned. "It doesn't strike me as r-r-respectful."

"You try it," I said. "It's the only way."

"I'll be glad when it's over," he remarked dreamily.

"Whatever you do, keep clear of set speeches," I went on. "Blurt it out, no matter how badly — but with all the fire and ginger in you."

He gazed at me like a dead calf.

"Here goes," he said, and started on a trembling walk toward the house.

I don't know whether he was afraid, or didn't get the chance, or what it was; but at any rate the afternoon wore on without the least sign of his coming to time. I kept tab on him as well as I could — checkers with Miss Drayton — half an hour writing letters — a long talk with the major — and finally his getting lost altogether in the shrubbery with an old lady. Freddy said the suspense was killing her, and was terribly despondent and miserable. I couldn't interest her in the Sev-

enty-second Street house at all. She asked what was the good of working and worrying, and figuring and making lists — when in all probability it would be another girl that would live there. She had an awfully mean opinion of my constancy, and was intolerably philosophical and Oh-I-wouldn't-blame-you-the-least-little-bit-if-you-did-go-off-and-marry-somebody-else! She took a pathetic pleasure in loving me, losing me, and then weeping over the dear dead memory. She said nobody ever got what they wanted, anyway; and might she come, when she was old and ugly and faded and weary, to take care of my children and be a sort of dear old aunty in the Seventy-second Street house. I said certainly not, and we had a fight right away.

As we were dressing for dinner that night I took Jones to task, and tried to stiffen him up. I guess I must have mismanaged it somehow, for he said he'd thank me to keep my paws out of his affairs, and then went into the bath-room, where he shaved and growled for ten whole minutes. I itched to throw a

bootjack at him, but compromised on doing a little growling myself. Afterward we got into our clothes in silence, and as he went out first he slammed the door.

It was a disheartening evening. We played progressive euchre for a silly prize, and we all got shuffled up wrong and had to stay so. Then the major did amateur conjuring till we nearly died. I was thankful to sneak out-of-doors and smoke a cigar under the starlight. I walked up and down, consigning Jones to — well, where I thought he belonged. I thought of the time I had wasted over the fellow — the good money — the hopes — I was savage with disappointment, and when I heard Freddy softly calling me from the veranda I zigzagged away through the trees toward the lodge gate. There are moments when a man is better left alone. Besides, I was in one of those self-tormenting humors when it is a positive pleasure to pile on the agony. When you're eighty-eight per cent. miserable it's hell not to reach par. I was sore all over, and I wanted the balm — the

consolation — to be found in the company of those cold old stars, who have looked down in their time on such countless generations of human asses. It gave me a wonderful sense of fellowship with the past and future.

I was reflecting on what an infinitesimal speck I was in the general scheme of things, when I heard the footfall of another human speck, stumbling through the dark and carrying a dress-suit case. It was Jones himself, outward bound, and doing five knots an hour. I was after him in a second, doing six.

"Jones!" I cried.

He never even turned round.

I grabbed him by the arm. He wasn't going to walk away from me like that.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

"Home!"

"But say, stop; you can't do that. It's too darned rude. We don't break up till tomorrow."

"I'm breaking up now," he said.

"But —"

"Let go my arm —!"

"Oh, but, my dear chap —" I began.

"Don't you dear chap me!"

We strode on in silence. Even his back looked sullen, and his face under the gas-lights —

"Westoby," he broke out suddenly, "if there's one thing I'm sensitive about it is my name. Slap me in the face, turn the hose on me, rip the coat off my back — and you'd be astounded by my mildness. But when it comes to my name I — I'm a tiger!"

"A tiger," I repeated encouragingly.

"It all went swimmingly," he continued in a tone of angry confidence. "For five seconds I was the happiest man in the United States. I — I did everything you said, you know, and I was dumfounded at my own success. S-s-she loves me, Westoby."

I gazed inquiringly at the dress-suit case.

"We don't belong to any common Joneses. We're Connecticut Joneses. In fact, we're the only Joneses — and the name is as dear to me, as sacred, as I suppose that of Westoby is, perhaps, to you. And yet — and yet —

do you know what she actually said to me? Said to me, holding my hand, and, and — that the only thing she didn't like about me was my *name*."

I contrived to get out, "Good heavens!" with the proper astonishment.

"I told her that Van Coort didn't strike me as being anything very extra."

"Wouldn't it have been wiser to —?"

"Oh, for myself, I'd do anything in the world for her. But a fellow has to show a little decent pride. A fellow owes something to his family, doesn't he? As a man I love the ground she walks on; as a Jones — well, if she feels like that about it — I told her she had better wait for a De Montmorency."

"But she didn't say she wouldn't marry you, did she?"

"N-o-o-o!"

"She didn't ask you to *change* your name, did she?"

"N-o-o-o!"

"And do you mean to say that just for one unfortunate remark — a remark that any one

might have made in the agitation of the moment — you're deliberately turning your back on her, and her broken heart!"

"Oh, she's red-hot, too, you know, over what I said about the Van Coorts."

"She couldn't have realized that you belonged to the Connecticut Joneses. *I* didn't know it. *I* —"

"Well, it's all off now," he said.

It was a mile to the depot. For Jones it was a mile of reproaches, scoldings, lectures and insults. For myself I shall ever remember it as the mile of my life. I pleaded, argued, extenuated and explained. My lifelong happiness — Freddy — the Seventy-second Street house — were walking away from me in the dark while I jerked unavailingly at Jones' coat-tails. The whole outfit disappeared into a car, leaving me on the platform with the ashes of my hopes. Of all obstinate, mulish, pig-headed, copper-riveted —

I was lucky enough to find Eleanor crying softly to herself in a corner of the veranda. The sight of her tears revived my fainting

courage. I thought of Bruce and the spider, and waded in.

"Eleanor," I said, "I've just been seeing poor Jones off."

She sobbed out something to the effect that she didn't care.

"No, you can't care very much," I said, "or you wouldn't send a man like that — a splendid fellow — a member of one of the oldest and proudest families of Connecticut — to his death."

"Death?"

"Well, he's off for Japan to-morrow. They're getting through fifty doctors a week out there at the front. They're shot down faster than they can set them up."

I was unprepared for the effect of this on Eleanor. For two cents she would have fainted then and there. It's awful to hear a woman moan, and clench her teeth, and pant for breath.

"Oh, Eleanor, can't you do anything?"

"I am helpless, Ezra. My pride — my woman's pride —"

"Oh, how can you let such trifles stand between you? Think of him out there, in his tattered Japanese uniform — so far from home, so lonely, so heartbroken — standing undaunted in that rain of steel, while —"

"Oh, Ezra, stop! I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

"Is the love of three years to be thrown aside like an old glove, just because —"

Her face was so wild and strained that the lies froze upon my tongue.

"Oh, Ezra, I could follow him barefooted through the snow if only he —"

"He's leaving Grand Central to-morrow at ten forty-five," I said.

She fumbled at her neck, and almost tore away the diamond locket that reposed there.

"Take him this," she whispered hoarsely. "Take it to him at once, and say I sent it. Say that I beg him to return — that my pride crumbles at the thought of his going away so far into danger."

I put the locket carefully into my pocket.

"And, Eleanor, try and don't rub him the

wrong way about his name. Is it worth while? There have to be Joneses, you know."

"Tell him," she burst out, "tell him — oh, I never meant to wound him — truly, I didn't . . . a name that's good enough for him is good enough for me!"

The next morning at nine I pulled up my Porcher-Mufflin car before Jones' door. He was sitting at his table reading a book, and he made no motion to rise as I came in. He gave me a pale, expressionless stare instead, such as an ancient Christian might have worn when the call-boy told him the lions were ready in the Colosseum. Resignation, obstinacy and defiance — all nicely blended under a turn-the-other-cheek exterior. He looked woe-begone, and his thin, handsome face betrayed a sleepless night and a breakfastless morning. I could feel that my presence was the last straw to this unfortunate medical camel.

I threw in a genial remark about the weather, and took a seat.

Jones hunched himself together, and squirmed a sad little squirm.

"Mr. Westoby," he said, "I once made use of a very strong expression in regard to you. I said, if you remember, that I'd be obliged if you'd keep your paws —"

"Don't apologize," I interrupted. "I forgot it long ago."

"You've taken me up wrong," he continued drearily. "I should like you to consider the remark repeated now. Yes, sir, repeated."

"Oh, bosh!" I exclaimed.

"You have a very tough epidermis," he went on. "Quite the toughest epidermis I have met with in my whole professional career. A paper adequately treating your epidermis would make a sensation before any medical society."

Somehow I couldn't feel properly insulted. The whole business struck me as irresistibly comical. I lay back in my chair — my uninvited chair — and roared with laughter.

I couldn't forbear asking him what treatment he'd recommend.

He pointed to the door, and said laconically: "Fresh air."

I retorted by laying the diamond locket before him.

"My dear fellow," I said, as he gazed at it transfixed, "don't let us go on like a pair of fools. Eleanor charged me to give you this, and beg you to return."

I don't believe he heard me at all. That flashing trinket was far more eloquent than any words of mine. He laid his head in his hands beside it, and his whole body trembled with emotion. He trembled and trembled, till finally I got tired of waiting. I poked him in the back, and reminded him that my car was waiting down stairs. He rose with a strange, bewildered air, and submitted like a child to be led into the street. He had the locket clenched in his hand, and every now and then he would glance at it as though unable to believe his eyes. I shut him into the tonneau, and took a seat beside my chauffeur.

"Let her out, James," I said.

James let her out with a vengeance. There was a sunny-haired housemaid at the Van Coorts' . . . and it was a crack, new

four-cylinder car with a direct drive on the top speed. Off we went like the wind, jouncing poor Jones around the tonneau like a pea in a pill-box. But he didn't care. Was he not seraphically whizzing through space, obeying the diamond telegram of love? In the general whizzle and bang of the whole performance he even ventured to raise his voice in song, and I could overhear him behind me, adding a lyrical finish to the hum of the machinery. It was a walloping run, and we only throttled down on the outskirts of Morristown. You see I had to coach him about that Japanese war business, or else there might be trouble! So I leaned over the back seat and gently broke it to him. I thought I had managed it rather well. I felt sure he could understand, I said, the absolute need of a little — embellishing and —

"Let me out," he said.

I feverishly went on explaining.

"If you don't let me out I'll climb out," he said, and began to make as good as his word over the tonneau.

Of course, there was nothing for it but to stop the car.

Jones deliberately descended and headed for New York.

I ran after him, while the chauffeur turned the car round and slowly followed us both. It was a queer procession. First Jones, then I, then the car.

Finally I overtook him.

"Jones," I panted. "Jones."

He muttered something about Ananias, and speeded up.

"But it was an awfully tight place," I pleaded. "Something had to be done; you must make allowances; it was the first thing that came into my head — and you must admit that it worked, Jones. Didn't she send you the locket? Didn't she —?"

"What a prancing, show-off, matinée fool you've made me look!" he burst out. "I have an old mother to support. I have an increasing practice. I have already attracted some little attention in my chosen field — eye, ear and throat. A nice figure I'd cut, traips-

ing around battle-fields in a kimono, and looking for a kindly bullet to lay me low. If I were ever tempted by such a thing — which God forbid — wouldn't I prefer to spread bacilli on buttered toast?"

"I never thought of that," I said humbly.

"I have known retail liars," he went on. "But I guess you are the only wholesaler in the business. When other people are content with ones and twos you get them out in grosses, packed for export!"

He went on slamming me like this for miles. Anybody else would have given him up as hopeless. I don't want to praise myself, but if I have one good quality it's staying power. I pleaded and argued, and expostulated and explained, with the determination of a man whose back is to the wall. I wasn't going to lose Freddy so long as there was breath in my body. However, it wasn't the least good in the world. Jones was as impervious as sole-leather, and as unshaken as a marble pillar.

Then I played my last card.

I told him the truth! Not the *whole* truth, of course, but within ten per cent. of it. About Freddy, you know, and how she was determined not to marry before her elder sister, and how Eleanor's only preference seemed to be for him, and how with such a slender clue to work on I had engineered everything up to this point.

"If I have seemed to you intolerably prying and officious," I said, "well, at any rate, Jones, there's my excuse. It rests with you to give me Freddy or take her from me. Turn back, and you'll make me the happiest man alive; go forward, and — and —"

I watched him out of the corner of my eye.

His tread lost some of its elasticity. He was short-circuiting inside. Positively he began to look sort of sympathetic and human.

"Westoby," he said at last, in a voice almost of awe, "when they get up another world's fair you must have a building to yourself. You're colossal, that's what you are!"

"I'm only in love," I said.

"Well, that's the love that moves mountains," he said. "If anybody had told me that I should . . ." He stopped irresolutely on the word.

"Oh, to think I have to stand for all that rot!" he bleated.

I was too wise to say a word. I simply motioned James to switch the car around and back up. I shooed Jones into the tonneau and turned the knob on him. He snuggled back in the cushions, and smiled — yes, smiled — with a beautiful, blue-eyed, far-away, indulgent expression that warmed me like spring sunshine. Not that I felt absolutely safe even yet — of course I couldn't — but still —

We ran into Freddy and Eleanor at the lodge gates. I had already telephoned the former to expect us, so as to have everything fall out naturally when the time came. We stopped the car, and descended — Jones and I — and he walked straight off with Eleanor, while I side-stepped with Freddy.

She and I were almost too excited to talk.

It was now or never, you know, and there was an awfully solemn look about both their backs that was either reassuring or alarming — we couldn't decide quite which. Freddy and I simply held our breath and waited.

Finally, after an age, Jones and Eleanor turned, still close in talk, still solemn and enigmatical, and drew toward us very slowly and deliberately. When they had got quite close, and the tension was at the breaking point, Eleanor suddenly made a little rush, and, with a loud sob, threw her arms round Freddy's neck.

Jones fidgeted nervously about, and seemed to quail under my questioning eyes. It was impossible to tell whether things had gone right or not. I waited for him to speak . . . I saw words forming themselves hesitatingly on his lips . . . he bent toward me quite confidentially . . .

"Say, old man," he whispered, "is there any place around here where a fellow can buy an engagement ring?"

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